The politics of quality improvement: exploring the complexity of teaching and learning practices in Further Education

by

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'Each of my works is a part of my own biography. For one or other reason I had occasion to feel and live those things' **(Foucault, 1988a: 11)**

Abstract

This research constitutes an extended inquiry into quality improvement policies and how they are connected with teaching practices in Further Education. It is a case study of an FE college that examines how quality agendas, informed by neoliberalism, create contradictory and complex contexts in which teachers produce different types of practices for specific purposes. Apart from an in-depth exploration of recent policy agendas, data was collected using semi-structured interviews and unobtrusive observations in and outside classrooms. This qualitative study uses Michel Foucault's archaeology and genealogy as analytical tools to critically examine the dichotomies between practices focusing on day-to-day pedagogies and practices produced for performance management and accountability purposes. By attending to a Foucauldian conception of power and counter-conduct, my work explores new means of defining quality in teaching spaces. I have shown how existing quality judgements, informed by reductionism, present either a bleak or a sanguine view of what particular teaching practices and quality agendas may entail.

This research illuminates the significance of moving slightly away from an institutionalised enterprise culture and loosening our relations with reductionist approaches as a starting point. While doing so, this proposition will help recognise other ways of looking at the complex character of pedagogical real(s) and embrace an emergentist and a process-oriented conception of quality. With this alternative position sketched out, I argue that we need to unlearn our knowledge of quality that overlooks contextual constraints and opportunities enmeshed in teaching practices. We must question the assumptions that the existing methods of observation are capable of quantifying the quality of education in a classroom, department or a college in toto. We need to show that this so-called system of robust accountabilities is not as self-evident as we believe. In other words, we must rethink quality by unthinking our current common sense.

CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction

This study offers a reinterpretation of the notion of quality in Further Education (FE), disputing common assertions that either view quality improvement policies as ready-made recipes for improving teaching and learning or describe them as a key management tool designed to provide accountability and keep teachers under control by increasing their stress levels. In recent years, much has been written on the topic of quality of education and how it may be improved by making changes to the overall structure of quality improvement mechanisms. In this thesis, my intention is rather unpresuming; I aim to add my contribution into the mix - a contribution that not only resonates well with the existing literature, but also questions a kind of common sense created by applicable yet simplistic solutions to issues stemming from the matters of sheer complexity. I seek to analyse an ideology that has implied itself in the manifestation of established policies and practices in the realm of FE and created a type of sensibleness for the times we live in. So far, writers and education policy makers have predominantly interpreted the role and effectiveness of quality improvement initiatives in FE - such as classroom observations - from a reductionist position which present either a bleak or a sanguine view of what particular teaching practices and quality agendas may entail. (See O'Leary, 2014; Archer et al, 2016).

I provide a brief historical account of the origins of FE with a genealogical analysis of the development of an institutionalised enterprise culture. My analysis shows how the notions of accountability and performance continue to be considered as fundamental bulwarks of quality. Through an explication of the issues of uncertainty and non-linearity in educational practices, the analysis untangles this otherwise recondite side of Foucault's works as a complexity theorist. Additionally, I discuss how Foucault's ideas can help us reconceptualise power relations and modes of resistance which connect the analysis of teaching practices with quality assurance schemes in institutional and historical settings. In this approach, things can no longer be taken for granted and the dynamics of changing power relations cannot merely be understood in terms of the compelled treatment of FE teachers and the subjugations by which they are dominated. Instead, the focus of the analysis goes beyond a conception of power which is based on force by exposing the mechanics

of disciplinary procedures, nuanced by unique situations, offering alternative ways of understanding the character of commonly accepted realities of our time. As Foucault puts it:

> I do not conduct my analysis in order to say: this is how things are, look how trapped you are. I say certain things only to the extent to which I see them as capable of permitting the transformation of reality

(Foucault, 1991a, p. 174).

It is this transformation I want to explore. So, in other words, I can demonstrate the way in which it opens up opportunities of developing a line of thought that puts critique at its centre by contesting existing claims made in favour or against contemporary systems of teaching and learning, and how they are assessed in Further Education. This will help recognise other ways of looking at the complex character of pedagogical and quality real(s).

The project aims to investigate teaching, learning and assessment policies and procedures designed to monitor FE teachers' performance and the ways in which they are connected with teaching practices in an ESOL classroom. The key procedures used to measure and check the quality of pedagogical practices include different auditing, standardisation and accountability exercises such as classroom observations, learning walks, mentoring, communities of practice, team teaching, student fora and surveys, attendance in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes and a close scrutiny of teachers' planning documentation. The study will particularly explore the effects of observation mechanisms associated with quality assurance and improvement in Further Education.

FE teachers are likely to be observed four to five times a year; these include internal, mock and Ofsted inspections. If a teacher is unable to demonstrate the required skills, they are expected to undergo another inspection within a given time period. Some considerable research has been carried out on the process and effectiveness of observed language lessons and their impact on teaching and learning in educational establishments. While quality department supervisors in FE insist that observations are an important tool in raising standards, a number of English Language Teaching

(ELT) authors and educational researchers have argued against the incompatibility of observation criterion in relation to the research done on second language acquisition (SLA) (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2006, 2009; Lightbown and Spada, 2000; Mallows, 2002; Anderson, 2015). This research will consider these findings and will also look into the effects of observation on teachers in terms of balancing the workload between contact hours, lesson planning and the administration work they are expected to complete.

While it is important to look at the central elements of observation systems in Further Education and how they operate in the sector, it is critical to examine the political and ideological formations that frame these policies and practices and support this model of education. At present, education policymaking is a highly political matter. The so-called neutral and 'objective' approaches to teaching and learning policymaking gain their 'intellectual legitimacy' from policy sciences and processes that work to legitimise 'forms of... neoliberal state hegemony' (Olssen *et al.*, 2004, p. 2). In neoliberalism, the economy and management are concerned with competition, accountability and control and these concepts are at odds with the traditional principles of educational discourse such as teacher autonomy and trust on educationists. The inclusion of market-based principles of capitalism such as compliance and control in educational organisations is a relatively new phenomenon within educational professionalism. This is an ideal time to analyse the politics of accountability and assessment of teachers in FE, and also to explore the government's vision of educational policy in FE which is imbued with a range of market-driven demands designed to normalise, control and shape people's conduct (Ainley, 1999; Simmons, 2010; Hursh, 2001; Jankowski and Provezis, 2014). This work aims to examine the actions of FE practitioners and institutions in relation to assessment and compliance schemes and their impact on teachers in more detail.

Apart from measuring performance in classroom observations, the existing system requires compliance with Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education) regulations in terms of the intent, implementation and impact of curriculum planning and delivery and the extent to which it develops students' knowledge, skills and behaviours. From the perspective of quality assurance departments in FE institutions, improving conformity with Ofsted requirements results in a better learner experience and higher exam results as well as more efficient teaching practices. Teachers need to produce 'evidence' of good practice in relation to student progress in their documents and live

teaching. The fact that methods such as an 'outcomes-based approach' to assess teaching and learning permeate every aspect of quality improvement agendas has led some practitioners to interpret such policies as tools to provide accountability. So, is the role of these improvement plans more geared towards strengthening the highest pedagogical standards and improving teaching practices, or are these agendas used as mechanisms through which individuals and institutions are subjected to close scrutiny and control? If it is the latter - to what extent do these interventions facilitate a system of accountability? Or are such policies and practices, in actual fact, related to the several different strands of improvement and accountability?

Thinking about these issues then leads us to the following question:

- *What is the relationship between FE policy frameworks for observation practices and everyday ESOL teaching practices?*

Within FE policies and practices, I do not merely intend to confine the word 'observation' to the matter of classroom observations. Here, I use it in the Foucauldian sense. It represents a broad range of techniques employed to gather more knowledge about teachers; observation, as an instrument of power through which teachers may be turned into self-scrutinising and self-regulating subjects. This research examines the mechanisms of this form of governance and the disciplinary techniques of managerial systems that underpin the apparatus of observations designed to interface with everyday teaching practices.

The research uses observation and audit practices in the ESOL department of the college used as a case study for this project. Nonetheless, the scope of this investigation has a much wider significance as it examines national and local policy frameworks designed for all educational areas that fall in the remit of FE colleges, not just ESOL. The interviews from the College Principal and the Director of Quality also provide a rounded view of quality agendas and the way they operate in the existing system.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. This chapter sets the scene by providing an overview of the history of FE. This involves outlining the process of educational planning at different periods of FE history and showing how neoliberalism has been at the centre of policy reforms in the last 70 years

or so. Further, I will argue that the most recent policy agendas seem to mark a shift from a competitive focus to one that can be interpreted as more collaborative, but at the same time the focus on making FE colleges more responsive to the market is intensified. I explain, moreover, that the current system which sees FE simply in terms of strengthening the economy has its own challenges.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of debates around neoliberalism and how it is linked with education policies including Further Education. I take the literature review further by paying critical attention to the aims and methods involved in the observation and classification of individuals as well as organisations. Foucault's concept of governmentality is used to achieve a deeper understanding of the theoretical underpinning of the neoliberal way of policy making. The utilisation of literature on complexity aims to present readers of this thesis, with a description of the teaching and learning processes as well as the features that make those processes inherently complex. The chapter takes different models of teacher education into account and examines the principles of the disciplinary mechanism that requires bodies, at individual and organisational levels, to be more reflective, efficient and productive. In chapter 3, I take this analysis further by outlining the relevance of complexity theory in relation to FE as well as how the theory bears striking similitude to Michel Foucault's work. I provide an overview of Foucault's theoretical position, exploring his analytical tools of archaeology and genealogy which are pivotal to an understanding of hierarchical structures with the emergence of new subjectivities and power relations.

 Chapter 4 presents the research design and develops a rationale for using an investigative method informed by Foucault's idea of discursive practices. It also provides a very brief introduction to the main ideas presented by Pierre Bourdieu to provide a contrast and to show how Foucauldian approach gives a fresh impetus to a study such as this in terms of accommodating the inherent randomness of a complex process of teaching and learning. Much of my attention in this chapter is devoted to highlighting the ways in which Foucault's archaeology and genealogy can be used as a framework for exploring the ways in which the assemblage of quality assurance and improvement is linked to everyday teaching practices and how it enables a critical analysis of the effects of observation schemes on teachers. I explain how data was collected and elaborate a framework for its analysis.

Chapter 5 introduces the college used as a case study for this research. I discuss my role in relation to the matters of ethics, reflexivity and power relations. Chapter 6 offers a detailed analysis of the latest Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF) and how neoliberal political rationality embedded in the framework changes the ultimate meaning of teaching and learning. Chapter 7 continues with neoliberalism, uncovering its effects on teaching practices and how its core assumptions about teaching and learning - which tend to treat them as static, linear and measurable - create a gap between what teachers do in the classroom and what they are expected to do. Chapter 8 discusses the manifestation of complexity through an interpretation of teaching practices. It elaborates on expressions of creativity and transversality by paying particular attention to polymorphous connections between teaching, learning and policy discourses. The chapter highlights the importance of taking a relational view and paying attention to interactions between different elements rather than assessing teaching practices in isolation of the system. It is shown how teaching practices are a combination of compliance and non-compliance at the same time making hierarchal relations complex and transversal rather than based on an oppressive and top-down model.

Chapter 9 takes the complexity analysis further by introducing the notion of 'documentisation'. This chapter traces the connection between policies and practices by employing Foucault's idea of 'dispositif' which enables an exploration of quality as a system; a system which is neither marked by oppressiveness nor an exemplar of good practice - it is a system of performance expectations. I draw attention to the complex sets of power relations teachers and senior managers are placed in and their role in the construction and maintenance of quality dispositif in FE. I focus on materialities and emergence of new power effects within the contemporary discourse of quality. I explicate how documentisation is a product of a rationality that has ossified the fluid and incidental character of teaching and learning.

Chapter 10 concludes by recapping the overarching aims of this research and by critiquing the contemporary tools of knowability informed by reductionism. Central to my thesis, then, is the claim that the existing quality apparatus is not entirely capable of representing the quality of teaching as it overlooks and sometimes ignores or remains silent on the situatedness of practices in the given context. The study argues for a new conception of quality improvement mechanisms based on an understanding of teaching and learning as process and as a sight of eco-social atmosphere wherein quality is about adapting to existing conditions, dealing with emerging challenges, taking localness

into account and noticing self-organising patterns. The theorisation of this mechanism involves moving beyond instant impacts and straightforward outcomes and embracing pedagogical directions based on new process-oriented definitions of the judgement labels such as 'inadequate' and 'outstanding'

1.1. Background

In my pursuit of trying to explore the implications of quality improvement initiatives in Further Education, the question I address here is how we might understand the role of these initiatives seeking to promote 'quality' in relation to the complexity of teaching practices. This project takes the case of one Further Education college, focusing in particular on ways in which teaching, learning and assessment practices are carried out and how they are expected to exhibit high quality standards.

In order to understand teachers' working practices and how they are affected by policies, it is important to evaluate the context of historic structural changes and political processes that have played a major role in the development of the sector and how it operates at present. It is in this context that this section aims to focus on changes over the decades, highlighting the underpinning political rationality translated into organisational structures and relationships between teachers, policy makers and other socio-material factors. Therefore, the starting point of this thesis is the acknowledgement that education in general and Further Education in particular has been subject to different universal reforms driven by finance. A brief history of FE will help us understand the historical relevance of changes over time and explain various ideologically driven policy initiatives that shape its existing operation.

This section will look at the five or potentially six key periods in the history of FE and how changes in policy reforms over time have shaped the way this sector operates today. There is an overview of the first period starting from vocational education in the 19th century up to the period of the Second World War. The 1944 Education Act, which provided a clear definition of the sector, began the second phase. The third period constitutes the developments and changes in the sector during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. From the late 1970s through to the 1980s and then from 1993 onwards are the

fourth and fifth periods. Finally, the 2021 Skills for Jobs White Paper, which represents a shift in ideas, marks the beginning of the sixth phase of a post-incorporation era.

1.1.1.   FE history: an overview

The Further Education sector in the UK provides a route to Higher Education or employment, to those who do not achieve the required results in school or are without the desired formal qualifications. The genesis of the sector in England occurred during the Victorian period, wherein technical education was provided for the working classes through localised organisations established by various philanthropists and industrialists. The first education department was formally established in 1856 however compulsory education for 5 to 10 years olds was not brought in until 1881. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were first introduced in the 1902 Education Act, and these LEAs continued to operate and oversee schools and Further Education colleges throughout the post-war period. The demand for FE provision kept growing as the number of FE students increased from 600,000, in 1910-1911, to 1.2 million by 1937 -1938. According to the Ministry of Education archives, this demand was accommodated by some 'showcase' colleges only in certain towns and cities (MoE, 1951).

The 1944 Education Act, also known as the 'Butler Act' changed the name of the Board of Education to the Ministry of Education and laid out the role and remit of FE organisations. The Butler Act placed a statutory duty upon all LEAs to secure 'adequate provision for Further Education … by 1947 there were 680 major establishments of FE maintained by LEAs – double the 1938 total' (Simmons, 2014, pp. 57-60). The expansion of education provision following the 1944 Act led to an increase in the number of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs). In 1949, there were 527 HMIs compared to 383 in 1922. Although the first HMIs were appointed in the late 1830s, according to the Department for Education and Science records, it was not until the mid-1950s that HMIs became responsible for inspecting FE providers and reporting on their effective use of financial resources (DES, 1970, pp. 1-19). Thus, the inspection of English FE colleges' utilisation of financial resources began before the emergence of neoliberalism as the dominant economic rationality in the English education system; however, attempts to regulate all educational practices according to pro-market policies arguably

did not begin to emerge until the late 1950s, and intensified from the 1970s onwards through influential organisations such as The Institute of Economic Affairs.

The Institute of Economic Affairs, a right-wing think-tank created in 1955, has its roots in neoliberalism. The institute, in the 70s, 'worked tirelessly to persuade the Conservative Party to abandon the post-war welfare consensus and embrace social and educational policies based on nineteenth-century free-market anti-statism' (Chitty, 2009, p. 47). It was not until the 1960s when the effects of the broadening of FE provision, brought about by the Butler Act, were seen as more full-time day courses were introduced in FE establishments. These developments were a direct result of the economic crises of the time. The emphasis on vocationalism paved the way for market-based reforms and made the sector more responsive to the emerging financial needs of the nation (Goldstone, 2019). The 1956 Technical Education White Paper proposed plans to establish Colleges of Advanced Technology (CATs) to address the lack of skilled workforce. According to the Association of Colleges website, CATs were an early version of larger and more advanced polytechnics which offered comprehensive vocational courses (AoC, 2015). From the 1960s and onwards government interventions sought to link the economic needs of the country to FE and LEAs were put under enormous pressure to meet targets set by the national government which also announced opening up 30 polytechnics as part of A Plan for Polytechnics and Other Colleges (DES, 1966).

James Callaghan, then Labour Prime Minister, started the 'Great Debate' in his speech at Ruskin College in 1976. He expressed his concerns about a disconnect between the aims of public education and those of industry and mentioned the need for a core curriculum to meet the needs of employers. Therefore, it is important to note that it has not just been Conservative but also Labour governments that have propelled education policy in a neoliberal direction. Further Education became the subject of further neoliberal policies when Mrs Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979. The inclusion of neoliberal values in education, such as individualism and entrepreneurialism, was justified by the mounting public pressure resulting from the rapid economic decline of the early 1970s.

As Exley and Ball (2014, p. 3) note, in the aftermath of the 1973 oil crisis and deindustrialisation, the problems of unemployment and inflation led to:

[some] high profile clashes between trade unions, businesses and government. Within the realm of education, high youth unemployment was blamed, by an increasingly influential and well-organised New Right political movement, not on the oil crisis, however, but instead on the perceived lamentable abolition of elitist selective education in favour of comprehensive schooling in England by a loony left statist educational establishment.

Along with teachers, their unions and academics, 'left-wing' LEAs were mistrusted and seen with suspicion by Thatcherite think tanks. There was an increased political pressure calling for an influence of business individuals, and other bodies including The Institute of Economic Affairs and Centre for Policy Studies, on education policy development.

Pressure mounted simultaneously for more direct links between education and economic policy, squeezing out "public educator" traditions of education for democracy and replacing these with a vocational focus on skills and training

(Exley and Ball, 2014, p. 3)

The 1980 Education Act and the 1988 Education Reform Act in England and Wales introduced policies that involved limitation of LEA control, 'business-like' accountability and formula funding triggered by recruitment and market-oriented competition between schools and FE colleges. Some major businesses played a key role in the formation of 16 City Technology Colleges (CTCs) which formed the basis for the Academy school programme later introduced by New Labour. National testing and national curriculum were also part of the 1988 act. LEAs' perceived reluctance to put the Tory education policies into effect and treat them with scepticism further weakened their power.

The 1992 and the 1996 Schools Inspection and Education Acts dealt severe blows to the power of LEAs to inspect schools. Kenneth Clarke, then the Secretary of State for Education, set up a body that 'would contract out school and college inspections to private companies' – and indeed it was none other than the Office for Standards in Education (Exley and Ball, 2014, p. 7). As of 1 April 1993, LEAs had no control over how colleges planned their budget, ran courses, recruited students or

managed their capital projects; all FE and Sixth Form colleges were incorporated. It was not an unexpected decision or something that surprisingly began in 1992-93. Incorporation was an inevitable consequence of the continuation of neoliberal policies lobbied by the right wing think tanks in the 1960s and enacted since Mrs Thatcher's government in the late 1970s. LEAs were already not in full control of the colleges, but the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act was the final straw that broke the camel's back. The 2000 Learning and Skills Act gave Ofsted an official authority to inspect FE colleges and school sixth forms. In 2005 the inspection notice period was shortened from up to ten weeks to 2 days.

Since LEAs lost control over post-compulsory education, Ofsted has been one of the key stakeholders involved in defining and regulating teaching, learning and assessment practices in schools and further education. Colleges now compete for students, who are seen as consumers that bring money like in other businesses. Most principals are now known as Chief Executive Officers and their roles increasingly involve financial and performance management (Daley, Orr and Petrie 2017). Education, like everything else, has been linked to economic growth. Education policies promote 'a 'skills agenda for learners of all ages' who are encouraged to opt in to 'more applied subjects useful for big business rather than less useful subjects in the arts, humanities and social sciences' (Exley and Ball, 2014, p. 4). This is a triumph for the market – neoliberalism has taken over the education sector too. This is the point. It is not just education; today, we live in a neoliberal society. Whilst some individuals' ideals of rationality and objectivity could rest on neoliberalism, it is also an integral part of how our institutions are designed, how they operate and how they are regulated – neoliberalism is 'out there' and 'in here' (Peck, 2003, p. 141). Modern economic principles determine the quantified value of things in terms of self-interest and financial gains. The experiential value, connected with selflessness, morality, art, nature and culture, that helps to elucidate the fabric of society is dwarfed by the spirit of competition and the rewards offered by a commercial enterprise.

Margaret Thatcher's proclamation announcing that 'there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families' not only ignores but also denies the existence of institutions of community (Margaret Thatcher, Woman's Own, October 3 1987). Arguably this mind-set lies at the centre of 'a post welfare state revival of nineteenth century classic or "first stage" economic liberalism' based on Adam Smith's arguments in his work *The Wealth of Nations* (Exley

and Ball, 2014, p. 1). It was somewhat based on nostalgia for how things operated in Victorian times whereby vocational training and education were reserved for the working classes as discussed earlier in this chapter. This ideology is based on the premise that the welfare of the public is not the government's job. The working classes need to be trained to find themselves work that can strengthen the economy and can put food on their table. They should not blame society or government for their problems but should fulfil responsibilities towards themselves.

The main ideas of Smith's work were based on the principles of 'individual liberty, property rights, a minimal state' whereby 'inequalities are inevitable, necessary but unintentional' (Exley and Ball, 2014). In this system, the roles and positions of individuals are defined by their financial assets. This division of wealth has a direct effect on house prices in areas where privileged individuals choose to live. Their decisions to buy properties are often influenced by the types of schools and colleges in particular areas, although there can be other determinants for such decisions. The inevitable consequence of these structural divisions thenceforward leads to the discursive construction of inequalities moving beyond individual levels and exhibiting across the boundaries of different educational institutions in different parts of the country. Harvey states that 'Neoliberalism is above all a project to restore class dominance to sectors that saw their fortunes threatened by the ascent of social democratic endeavours in the aftermath of the Second World War' (2007a, p. 22).

Class relations and economic factors have had an undeniable impact on the English education system and vice-versa. Ideas based on *human capital theory* view education as an investment with the expectation of an increased economic productivity of human labour (Moore 2004; Karabel and Halsey, 1977; Woodhall, 1997; Brown and Lauder, 2001). This process of labour production in schools, colleges and the workplace is entirely profit driven and controlled by economic rationality rather than based on human needs (Bowles and Gintis, 1976).

One of the key factors driving the changes in FE over time has been the growing significance of finance in educational policy making which has been predominantly committed to neoliberal ideas and values. The development of FE over the years has reflected the vested interests of social and political elites rooted in the inequalities of the early twentieth century and before. Just as privilege and inequality were allowed to continue and flourish in other areas of education, a range of

voluntary, private and religious bodies were permitted, and in some cases encouraged, to provide various forms of FE outside local authority control (Simmons, 2014 p. 58).

The last Labour government under Gordon Brown expressed its intention to give some power back to LEAs when it announced that publicly funded education and training for 14 to 19 years old students would be coordinated by local authorities (DCSF/ DIUS, 2008). Nonetheless, 'FE colleges were to continue as 'independent' corporations outside municipal control, and all forms of adult learning were to remain outside the ambit of county hall officials. However, the change of government which took place in May 2010 meant that this plan was effectively abandoned' (Simmons, 2014, p. 61). Avis (2009a) called it 'new localism' which highlighted the importance and ability of local authorities in dealing with complex issues, such as education, better than the central government.

Since these reforms were not implemented, the Thatcherite culture of entrepreneurialism, targets, audits, standards and inspections in education continued under the Coalition and Conservative governments in the last decade. The consequence of this became evident in policy makers' obsession with data-driven statistical monitoring which made teaching in FE a stressful activity and had a negative impact on quality of teaching and learning in the classroom (see Ball, 2009; Ofsted, 2014). The emphasis on qualification aims and achievement rates resulted in a situation whereby 'students are achieving more but learning less' (Ecclestone, 2007, p. 324). The neoliberal ethos of consumerism redefied what success looks like in education. As Illsley and Waller (2017, p. 481) put it, 'education has become an accreditation delivery system of 'skills' that could be accused of perpetuating a false image of success in an increasingly easy to manipulate format, potentially jeopardising the integrity of the entire education system'.

In the following section, important government policy initiatives over the period from 2015 to 2021 are explored, together with their indication of a slight shift from a competitive focus to one that can be understood as more collaborative.

1.2. FE in the last 5 years and now: is it the beginning of the end of neoliberalism in FE?

1.2.1. Area-based reviews

After winning the 2015 UK general election, the Conservative government revealed its intention of restructuring the post-16 education and training sector using a programme of Area-Based Reviews (ABRs) for English FE colleges (HMG 2015). ABRs were carried out between 2016 and 2018 with two key policy aims:

1. To merge FE colleges in order to create 'fewer often larger, more resilient and efficient providers'
2. To enable the sector to be more responsive to local business needs through more technical and professional courses leading to employment (Spours *et al.* 2020, p. 3).

Reading between the lines and looking at 'what was silently articulated "beyond" the text' (Foucault, 1981a, p. 58), it would appear that the government believed that FE colleges were not resilient and efficient, and their curriculum offer was not fit for purpose in relation to local employer needs; therefore, colleges had to be brought in line with the contemporary demand for skills. By highlighting the importance of making FE more responsive to the needs of the market and more efficient, the policy declared that previous policy trajectories had not been doing it adequately hence there needed to be a new intervention (Spours et al, 2020). Keeping the policy thinking of the last few decades - which led to the incorporation of FE colleges - in mind, it was quite a shift. The irony is that a marketized model of education itself turned out to have been less efficient than expected in terms of meeting the needs of the market. Further Education in recent history has not been under direct state control as colleges belong in the public sector. FE colleges have been expected to operate as enterprises for profit and devise their own business plans and strategies.

That is the reason why, unlike schools, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) categorises FE colleges as in the 'private sector'. Since 1993, LEAs had no control over how colleges plan, organise and run their strategy and administration. FE colleges were incorporated and left free to make their own decisions. This incorporation meant that FE colleges, like other commercial enterprises, were obliged

to compete with each other for students while at the same time relying on government funding. They were accountable to their governing bodies rather than local authorities. The ABRs objective could be seen as an admission that that incorporated FE colleges are at present somewhat out of touch with their localities.

The ABR process evolved from the Conservative government's austerity policy and its concerns about the ability of FE colleges to maintain and improve their financial health successfully (Doel, 2018). These concerns stemmed from increasing administrative costs incurred by FE colleges and how they used the logic of competitiveness to offer duplicate courses which ensured funding (Boles, 2015). This approach did not sit well with the UK government's Productivity Plan (HMG, 2015). ABRs were seen thenceforth as strategic interventions by the government. Additionally, by introducing 15 new T (Technical) levels, ABRs are also part of higher technical education reform agenda (DfE, 2016). ABRs should also be viewed in the context of the 2016 The Cities and Local government Devolution Act which, as Spours *et al.* (2020, p. 353) put it:

> ...was designed to introduce directly elected mayors to combined local authorities in
> England and Wales and to devolve housing, transport, planning and policing powers to
> them – a process known as "devo-deals". The London devo deal also included the
> devolution of the Adult Education Budget (AEB), discretionary support for 19+ learners
> and the creation of a Skills Commissioner for London.

Along with the Mayor and Greater London Authority (GLA), four sub-regional committees (Central, East, South and West) in London conducted the ABR process by coordinating with each other. These reviews were led by political leaders from local authorities who had their own interest in developing stronger relations between local communities and colleges and saw that as a *sine qua none* of local economic growth (ibid). In this sense it was a return of the same logic that was used to support the control of LEAs over local colleges before 1 April 1993. An approach based on coordination and collaboration at local level - so the outcomes could feed into the government policy - seemed to signal a key policy shift on the neoliberal FE project emanating from Theresa May's 'soft economic nationalism' (Pearce 2016 in Spours et al, 2020).

In terms of college mergers, ABR policy objectives have not brought anything new to the table as these mergers had been taking place for the last few decades. These include both 'rescue' and 'strategic' mergers whereby the former referred to a financially weaker college uniting with a financially stable college, and the latter involved the amalgamation of two colleges with equally strong financial health. This is so that the merger could lead to greater financial strength. (Calvert, 2009). Since mergers were seen as an important steppingstone to improve the financial viability of colleges in this policy initiative, 68 college mergers took place between 2016 and 2020 with more planned for 2021 (AoC, 2021). This process had not been limited to England; the policy of 'regionalisation' in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland also resulted in the emergence of new mega colleges as a result of mergers. Through ABRs, the government wanted to make colleges more viable in terms of their finances as well as more responsive to local economic needs. Nonetheless, the apparent paradox of this dual focus generates a key question: to what extent will a larger college, which is cheaper to run, be able to meet the breadth of the needs of various small local communities within its remit? It is perhaps a bit too early to answer this question.

1.2.2.   From incorporation to regionalisation

In May 2020, *FE Week* broke a story about the government's concerns over failing colleges and their inability to intervene in the crisis colleges were facing. The article included viewpoints of three former principals of FE colleges who are still involved in the sector through their influential roles within independent think tanks or as consultants. These former leaders reflected on their experience of working in the sector before incorporation and expressed their concerns about the current system. However, they all unequivocally ruled out the need for going back to pre-1992 era. One said, 'Pre-1992 doesn't fit a modern world. There was a great deal to be critical about under local authorities – political wheeling and dealing' (Staufenberg, 2020). They were interviewed separately but all three suggested a similar road map for making FE a sector that could better meet the contemporary needs of local economies.

Principal 1

"There needs to be a collaborative 21st version that's designed regionally"

Principal 2:

"My line would be some sort of regional education service for planning across an area".

Principal 3:

"My view of the future is to cover the rest of the country with the equivalent of Mayoral Combined Authorities, so there is regional accountability to the mayor. It would be to bring in a much stronger scrutiny side. There should be an elected member who is asking that question: 'what are you doing for this area?'" (ibid).

It is more or less the same view expressed in all three statements; there is a need to bring in some accountability through regional governments without reinstating the pre-incorporation model entailing excessive powers and privileges of authorities at local or central level, although they do not say exactly how this would be achieved. It is difficult to say whether any of these former leaders were part of any consultation processes held by the government, but their vision of the future of FE is reflected in the most recent policy document released in January 2021 –*Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth*.

1.2.3.   Skills for Jobs White Paper

The 'common sense' defined by the White Paper for Further Education continues to juxtapose all educational activities with the interests of the market. For example, the executive summary starts with the theme of lifelong learning in relation to the skills the UK economy needs. It is described as the 'core mission' leading to increased productivity and more support for growth industries. The key focus is on 'growth' and 'jobs' and will be delivered by:

- Putting employers at the heart of the system so that education and training leads to jobs that can improve productivity and fill the skills gap
- Investing in higher-level technical qualifications that provide a valuable alternative to a university degree
- Making sure people can access training and learning flexibly throughout their lives

There is an implicit criticism of the existing educational system which produces too many university graduates with degrees that are of little or no use to the local and national economy. Therefore, the country needs 'higher technical' qualifications so there are more engineers, technicians and social care professionals. The White Paper makes several references to the Augar Review which is the existing Conservative government's independent panel report on Post -18 Education and Funding published in 2019. The report emphasises the importance of making FE colleges more aware of the local demand of skills and maintaining 'strong relationships with employers and act[ing] as engines of social mobility and inclusion' (Augar, 2019, p. 138). This vision is reflected in the White Paper too and makes clear that FE colleges need to collaborate with employers to identify demands of the local labour market so those findings can feed into their curriculum offer.

Local Skills Improvement Plans will not only bring FE curricula in line with regional job markets, but will also make local authorities, as key stake holders, part of the decision-making process. People who opt for higher technical qualifications will have access to Lifelong Loan Entitlement. Strategic Development Funding will help provider to redesign their curriculum, so that it is more responsive to business needs. FE colleges will also use these funds to establish business centres within colleges so they can work with employers more closely. Initial Teacher Education will also need to be reshaped on employer-led standards.

It is not a surprise that in the White Paper the value of effective curricula and how they should be delivered is defined by domains of employability. Students need to be seen as technicians in the making, and the aim of education is reduced to skills development to protect the interests of the market. The idea of lifelong learning is an individualistic one in which all individuals are consumers (See Biesta, 2013; Beighton, 2015). The suggestions to revise the existing curricula and methods of teacher education seek to challenge the traditional education philosophies which locate aims of education in the process of developing students' political awareness, critical thinking, moral values, intellectual independence and their commitment to civic and social duties. This does not mean that a meeting of economic needs should not be included as a priority or that producing a technically

skilled workforce is undesirable. The idea that colleges should only be concerned with meeting the demands of skills, financial sustainability and growth is problematic. The purpose of educational organisations should not be limited to employability and linked solely to the demands of the labour market. A contemporary vision for education and a modern-day pedagogy should not be limited to technical training. Rather, it should prepare students to deal with 'challenges faced by humanity' not just by their local economy (Mikelatou and Arvanitis, 2021, p. 8).

The White Paper indicates a shift in terms of how FE colleges are funded by the government. This will involve moving from a yearly funding model to a multi-year funding mechanism, which should bring more certainty to curriculum planning and how colleges manage their budgets on a long-term basis. Reducing precarity in the funding and regulatory regimes could enable college leaders to be more forward looking in their strategic planning and how they maintain and grow their provision. Although the White Paper does not depart from the basic principles of neoliberalism based on a culture of 'danger', this initiative is likely to weaken the existing system of funding rules which is complex. It will reduce an inherent neoliberal necessity to readjust financial planning based on constantly changing demands imposed upon colleges and give them more certainty over their income.

The White Paper mentions new powers for the Secretary of State for Education, 'so the government can intervene quickly and decisively in cases where there are persistent problems...where colleges are not delivering effectively, or where local providers are consistently unable to deliver the skills priorities for that area' (DfE, 2021, p. 48). This comes seven months after a story published by *FE Week* had revealed 'anxiety in the heart of government about the lack of intervention powers when colleges are failing' (Staufenberg, 2020). This could be a first step towards the reclassification of colleges as public sector. The policy paper also reveals the government's intentions of developing an accountability structure for local areas, as it was suggested by the three former principals in the same report published in May 2020.

It is quite evident that local authorities are going to play an important role in how colleges plan their courses and engage with the local economy. They will not be given full control of FE colleges but will be part of a group of stakeholders who hold colleges to account for their respective areas. Colleges

are expected to work with each other collaboratively and avoid offering duplicate courses for the sake of funding.

These changes raise many questions that need to be asked around the success of neoliberal incorporation. First, colleges were expected to compete with each other and now they are asked to work collaboratively. Second, colleges were 'forced' to break ties with local authorities but now they are expected to re-establish those local links. Finally, co-funding rules meant that colleges were *forced* to borrow in order to meet the funding criteria. This meant that for each pound that came through funding, they had to borrow a pound from a bank or use their reserves. This policy took some colleges into huge debts which they remain unable to pay because of cuts and austerity plans. These colleges are, as a result, seen as failing organisations and now the government wants to introduce new accountability measures and more powers to intervene. That could be seen as a step away from neoliberalism.

The last chapter in the White Paper is about supporting outstanding teaching. The rationale behind this is based on the problems of recruitment and retention of teachers as well as the unpopularity of FE as a career choice amongst aspirant teachers. The proposed reforms for making teaching outstanding include developing strong relations between employers and colleges and changing initial teacher education so that it is based on employer-led standards. The reforms also include improvement of digital skills in order to support online and blended teaching (DfE, 2021, pp. 60-66). The underlying ethos of these proposals carries market-led meanings of quality of teaching and does not include an understanding of teaching in relation to research, complexity of teaching contexts and teaching methodologies.

1.2.4.   The experiment of incorporation: lessons to be learnt

Milton Friedman, thought to be one of the founding fathers of neoliberalism, states his perspective on policy change:

> Only a crisis – actual or perceived – produces real change. When that crisis occurs,
> the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe,
> is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive
> and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable

(Friedman, 1982, p. 7)

FE has been in crisis for many decades now; in the last 40 years or so, there have been 28 key pieces of legislation that have had a direct impact on the FE sector and 50 different secretaries of state who had FE in their remit did not entirely succeed in delivering what they had promised. The government now feels a need for another change. Getting local stakeholders on board and the need to acquire more powers to intervene is part of the change which aims to fix the problems FE has been dealing with (Orr, 2020). Critics assert that there is no way to establish that these changes are going to work this time and it is quite possible that this policy shift, as with those in the past, will fail to deliver. If that happens, the failure will likely to lead to another major shift in a few years' time.

The primary crisis in FE has always been linked to finance. The sector has been underfunded and that as a result translates into a lack of prestige and recognition. Politicians, parents and the wider public value academic education more than technical or vocational education. 'Broadly speaking, the middle classes do not send their children to GFEs [General Further Education Colleges] and vocational education still struggles for recognition and esteem' (Hodgson and Spours, 2016, p. 205). Studying for a three-year university degree is more popular than enrolling on higher technical courses. The number of students enrolling onto level 4 and level 5 FE courses dropped by 63% between 2009-10 and 2016-17 (Foster, 2019 in Orr, 2020). On the other hand, there was an increase in the number of students who enrolled on bachelor's degrees (HESA 2020 in Orr, 2020). The White Paper aims to address these issues by introducing new level 4 and above qualifications with flexible timetables and loans, but there needs to be more funding for FE colleges so they can attract industry specialists from technical areas to work for them on competitive rates.

Without a significant increase and security in funding, these new technical qualifications are likely to meet the same fate as previous changes. The 1992-93 incorporation meant that colleges were left to compete with each other for 'customers' but they were unable to afford industry specialists who could teach on their vocational courses. The funding mechanisms have been complicated as there are so many different funding streams and FE colleges receive very little for courses offered to adults.

In spite of the freedom to operate like independent organisations, FE colleges have remain somewhat dependent on the Exchequer and subject to government regulations. Financial dependency means that colleges have to be in full compliance with government policy objectives. This explains why all FE colleges, expected to operate like independent commercial enterprises, look the same in the way they work, offer similar courses and face similar issues. Many colleges have been struggling financially and some have gone financial administration. (Orr, 2020). This is also precisely the reason why Ruth Silver, a former FE principal, called the post -1992 independence 'a myth'. (Staufenberg, 2020).

It is important to note that the Conservative government's austerity policy meant reduced funding for FE colleges and that led to significant shrinkage of their curriculum offer causing a funding crisis. The ABRs were introduced as an attempt to tackle this crisis.The focus on wider collaboration at local and regional levels in this policy initiative shows that the government has been trying to find answers to the financial problems of the colleges by distancing itself from the marketized model of education (Spours et al, 2020). The idea of an FE college working as an independent and a competitive commercial enterprise has not been entirely successful as too much competition has meant that colleges have become disengaged from their local economies. They know more about other colleges they are competing with but very little about their local communities and how to cater for the needs of employers and potential employees within those communities.

Neoliberalism in education has not quite worked. There are clear indications of this admission of failure in recent policy documents. For example, whilst the Augar review acknowledges the role of competition in terms of 'creating choice for students', it suggests that if post-compulsory education is expected to 'deliver a full spectrum of social, economic and cultural benefits. [it] cannot be left entirely to market forces' (Augar, 2019, p. 8). 'That is a substantial shift in the rhetoric, which if met by a similar shift in policy would be significant for colleges, but perhaps not as significant as an overhaul of their funding' (Orr, 2000, p. 509). The Covid-19 pandemic is also likely to have serious repercussions for local economies. FE colleges need to be given the required funding if they are to lead the way in offering solutions to social and economic reverberations that society is now beginning to face in the post-Covid world.

1.3. Conclusion

The recent policy initiatives – which continue to define the role of education in relation to employability and the needs of the market - validate assertions that the epistemological underpinnings of FE policy making are still preponderantly neoliberal.

It will have become evident that there are many structural dilemmas attached to recent policy agendas. These include changing colleges from competitive organisations to more collaborative institutions but at the same time making their provision more consumer-led. These policy roadmaps provide colleges with more certainty and stability through multi-year funding plans but at the same time give local authorities and the central government more control over the FE sector. It can be described as a hybrid mix that is essentially based on neoliberalism with a touch of soft nationalisation of General Further Education colleges.

1.4. Key challenges

There are 163 General Further Education colleges, 47 Sixth Form colleges, 2 Art, Design and Performing Arts colleges, 12 Land-Based colleges and 10 Institutions of Adult Learning in the UK (AoC Key facts 2021/ 22); all regulated through funding agencies and Ofsted. Based on the history of FE and the way quality of teaching and learning is assessed based on neoliberal beliefs, I argue the sector now faces two fundamental challenges:

1. The system of accountability that allows funding agencies to exercise formula funding mechanisms through which colleges have to justify their existence in terms of success and retention rates, learner destinations, robust quality reviews, Ofsted grading, and financial management plans. This model is based on neoliberal principles of enterprise economy with strong emphasis on entrepreneurial competition whereby learning contexts are defined by the market trends. FE colleges now function as a state-dependent commercial enterprises with enrolment targets directly linked to government funding. Colleges compete with each other for students and that may account for the cuts in support services for those enrolled as well as the deletion of jobs in the departments that do not recruit to capacity. Teachers' increments are linked to their appraisal action plans which may include assigning teachers

targets about improving students' attendance and punctuality. Furlong (2013, p. 42) notes 'In short, the answer to improving the quality of education is the same answer it is in health or social welfare. It involves a rolling back of the state and establishing a diversified market of provision underpinned by rigorous, but simple, accountability structures'.

2. The use of blunt tools to assess quality of education often includes observations and audits criteria devised to track the key strengths and weaknesses in teaching practices. Internal and external quality reviews are used to check that improvement actions are linked to Ofsted and local teaching learning and assessment policies which then help with forming judgements. This challenge is connected to the first point in a sense that inspections and Self-Assessment Reports (SARs) ensure that improvement action points are linked to the industry themes and reflect the nature of the market. However, this point also poses a bigger challenge which is linked to the use of assessable quality interventions vis-à-vis measurable outcomes. This approach is at odds with the position which sees education as a complex phenomenon. This perspective problematizes the quality control systems of measurable outcomes in terms of how data captured from isolated parts is used to draw conclusions about the whole.

In this thesis I explore how we might understand the working practices of FE teachers in relation to policies that seek to improve the quality of education. My intention is to show the different ways in which the themes of neoliberalism and complexity seem to be intertwined and to make clear how these two notions are linked to different understandings of quality. This will allow me to show how and why everyday teaching practices do not always embody the key messages pronounced by policy makers. I argue that the procedures used to check compliance and quality in FE are problematic for a number of reasons. While some policy makers and senior managers may be convinced that quality improvement measures contribute to improvement, I challenge the interpretation of quality that stems from the ethos of business-oriented accountability. I will also be able to elaborate with more clarity how neoliberal principles are conveniently used to standardise teaching, learning and assessment planning and delivery in Further Education. It is precisely because of the way in which

quality improvement interventions are implemented that they are unable to reflect the complexity of teaching and learning.

My aim is not to unravel any oppressive structures and to free teachers, who are assumed to be unaware of their objective conditions, from the workings of power. Although literature on neoliberalism in education may be interpreted to suggest that it is policy makers who exert pressure on teaching staff by making them change and adapt their practices, an argument of such kind starts with an assumed position of inequality between oppressed teachers and the policy makers and senior managers who may be seen as oppressors in this context. Such a position also assumes that teachers need someone else to tell them about their oppression. Here, I seek to challenge the view that power centres around policy makers by using Michel Foucault's genealogical investigation.

This project is therefore not about reproducing what has been studied before. It neither runs on a 'truth' about the nature of observation practices or how effective or ineffective they might be. In fact, this project looks at the political dimensions of teaching and learning in FE from a slightly different angle. The purpose is rather to draw attention to alternative ways of looking at what is really going on in the classroom and what we can learn about the effects of quality assurance policies in relation to the role they play in shaping the conduct of teachers and senior managers.

Before I provide an explicit account of how I am going to use Foucault as a main theorist to construct the story of quality in Further Education and how his ideas can help us learn something new, it is important to look at the existing literature on observation practices, neoliberalism in educational policies and the notions of complexity and transversality.

CHAPTER 2

2. Literature review

2.1.   Neoliberalism in education

In modern times, it is argued that neoliberal capitalism has taken over all aspects of human life. Organisations that deal with education, telecommunications, energy supply, transportation and healthcare have been privatised and are driven by the logic of profit and efficiency. This has had an impact on how our political and social arenas are defined and perceived. The marketized logic of personal interest and surpluses to enhance economic efficiency and competition dictates our contemporary common sense. In this system, the worth of things is defined in terms of their market rather than ethical or moral value. In ancient traditions from the times of Aristotle, politics was supplementary to ethics as the morality of communities and the individuals within those communities shaped the socio-economic relations of a particular society. Niccolo Machiavelli was the first theorist to challenge this marriage between politics and ethics. His book *The Prince* is a compilation of his ideas about the art of governance divorced from morality. Because of its fascination with a demoralised perspective of governance and so-called political realism, the book is seen as a classic and his political theory is widely read and considered efficacious.

Although Machiavelli's The Prince was written in 1513, it was rediscovered in the nineteenth century with reference to contemporary 'literature that sought to replace the power of the prince with the art of government ... based on the central concept of economy' (Peters, 2007, p. 166). Neoliberalism as an organised form of governmentality (public management) made its appearance in the governments of Mrs Thatcher and Mr Reagan in the Western world. Its seductive appeal lay in the slogans of free trade, deregulation, economic liberalisation and open markets (see Harvey, 2007b; Giroux, 2002). These principles shaped common sense that attracted political parties of the Left, the Right and the Centre in the UK. At a micro level, neoliberalism introduced new managerialism engendered by the ethos of the private for-profit sector premised upon the notions of standards, targets, quality assurance, excellence, effectiveness, efficiency and reduction in spending costs (Deem, 2001, p. 10).

Within the context of education, the neoliberal conceptions of economic efficiency and entrepreneurialism were seen as inevitable solutions to problems faced by the public sector (Slater, 2015). Cutting state expenditures on education was part of the Washington Consensus (Dale, 1999). The economic policies behind the consensus were manifested through 19 different amendments in the education law by the Thatcher and Major administrations. Money was at the centre of these reforms as they involved the reduction of state spending on education and the introduction of market-based self-management for schools and colleges. Central to the issues of financial management in education is the political philosophy of neoliberalism. Although an ideology not consistently defined, 'the unstated and usually unexamined subtext of neoliberalism is not doctrine but money, particularly and crucially in the form of profit (Ball, 2012, p. 23).

Foucault, in his lectures at the Collège de France during 1978 and 1979 discussed the proponents of classical liberalism including Adam Smith, David Hume and David Ferguson as well as the development of two versions of neoliberal ideas after the Second World War – *Ordoliberalen* in Germany, referred to as the Freigberg School by Foucault and Human Capital theorists in America (Foucault, 1997a; Olssen 2006 ; Lemke 2001) The Freiberg School economists and jurists were mentioned as radically anti-naturalistic by Foucault. In other words, they believed in the state using its machinery to keep the market going rather than having a laissez-faire approach. Although their concepts were based on economic liberty and against unnecessary state interventions, they wanted the government to play its role in increasing competition and marketization of social and political relations. Foucault stated that *Ordoliberalen* believed in governments creating conditions for markets to exist with effective competition. Apart from encouraging competition, according to Foucault, this concept entailed universalising 'the entrepreneurial form... based on an equal inequality for all' (Lemke, 2001, p. 195). This pertained to the overall aim of increasing 'competitive forms throughout society so that social and work relations in general assume the market form, i.e., exhibit competition, obey laws of supply and demand' (Olssen, 2006, p. 218).

In his lectures, Foucault also focussed on the Chicago School of Human Capital theorists in the US who, like the Freigberg School, were also in favour of economic freedom but supported the exercise of caution vis-à-vis the uncontrolled development of bureaucratic mechanisms. Therefore, they wanted to strengthen the market to the point at which it was no longer dependent on the state. In fact, the state should abide by the laws defined by the markets. 'In doing this, the neoliberals in the

US extend economic criteria into spheres which are not economic and market exchange relations now govern all areas of voluntary exchange amongst individuals. In this model, the social and political spheres become redefined as economic domains' (Ibid., p. 219). Foucault opines that the American neoliberals saw the market as 'une sorte de tribunal économique permanent' (a kind of permanent economic tribunal) (Foucault, Lecture, March 21, 1979 in Lemke, 2001, p. 198). In other words, it is the market that establishes the governing conduct, rules and procedures within areas of activity that are essentially non-economic. In Foucault's view, an individual in this model is free to make their decisions, responsible for their profit and loss and at liberty to make their investments. It is in this sense he calls them 'entrepreneurs of themselves' in his 14 March 1979 lecture. (Foucault, 1984b; 1991a; 1993; 1997a; 2001). The key distinction in different forms of modern neoliberalism lies in the extent to which governments should intervene in the market and its strategies around investment, surplus value, commercial exchanges and rules for competition.

Despite some stark differences in different models of liberalism from the 17th to the 20th century, there are some common themes and characteristics in their use of reasoning in understanding the relationship between the government and the people. Olssen (2006, p. 220) points out, 'the special nature of the relationship between government and governed, and the priority of a market of free associations within this relationship, constitutes a central and continuous thread through the various different forms of liberalism'. The core values of neoliberalism, such as individual liberty, competition, equality of opportunities, accountability, audits, autonomy, rights to property and business and the concept of compliance, and how these principles are managed in everyday life make the system self-evident to the modern-day senses. Its own marketing campaign is slick and seductive. This is a triumph for the market – neoliberalism has taken over the education sector too.

This is the point. It is not just one sector; today, we live in a neoliberal society. Whilst some individuals' ideals of rationality and objectivity could rest on neoliberalism, it is also an integral part of how our institutions are designed, how they operate and how they are regulated – it becomes evidently clear in Peck's 'out there' and 'in here' characterisation of neoliberalism discussed earlier. (Peck, 2013, p. 141). The education system is no exception as the contemporary policy agendas based on compliance, obedience, linear systems, funding mechanisms and performance management are informed by the neoliberal standards of propriety. As Stephen Ball argues:

Education policy, education reform are no longer simply a battleground of ideas, they are a financial sector, increasingly infused by and driven by the logic of profit. As practitioners, researchers, activists we need to understand and engage with that logic and its mechanisms. We need to read the business pages, company reports and public service contracts. We need to understand the stock market, business strategy and company accounts - *we need to follow the money* [my emphasis]

(Ball, 2012, p. 27).

The way neoliberalism defined the relationship between the state and an individual caught Foucault's attention. The link between the government of the self and the government of the state, engendering the concept of an entrepreneurial individual living in a culture of monitoring, performance and accountability in a marketized institution, can provide a basis for understanding the neoliberal ideas of our time and how they shape the educational arena of modern-day Britain. In disciplinary power, the concept of government is no longer confined to people with the authority to govern a state; government of the self is an integral part of governmentality. It will be elaborated on in detail in the subsequent section. The notion of government of the self is linked to ethics – ethics in relation to technologies of self. By this Foucault means techniques for self-improvement. In other words, how individuals make use of known information to act upon themselves and behave as an enterprise. Technologies of self are 'formed alongside the technologies of domination such as discipline. The subjects created would produce the ends of government by fulfilling themselves rather than being merely obedient ... [they] would be obliged to be free in specific ways' (Rose *et al.*, 2009, p. 10)

2.1.1. A neoliberal college: neoliberalism in FE

As mentioned in the historical account of FE in the previous chapter, the removal of local education authorities' control over FE can be seen as a continuation of the governments' policies aiming for greater freedom for markets.

Free-market policies are at the heart of neoliberalism, and the education policy influenced by neoliberalism is deemed to be based on regulation and standardisation. This mindset sees education

as an economic phenomenon. This is particularly the case with Further Education which represents a consumerist vision of teaching and learning so that it can enhance the financial sector and be used to strengthen the economy (Simmons, 2010). This marketised system of demand and supply 'left remaining no other nexus between man and man [sic] than naked self-interest, than callous cash payment and egotistical calculation' (Marx and Engels, 1952, p. 24).

There is a broad agreement amongst FE managers and policy makers that standardisation exercises are an integral part of quality assurance measures. McNeil refutes this thinking and concludes that '*standardisation reduces the quality and quantity of what is taught and learned in schools… over the long term, standardisation creates inequalities, widening the gap between the quality of education for poor and minority youth and that of more privileged students*' [emphasis in original] (McNeil, 2000, p. 3). McNeil is not the only author to express this view. The assertion that education policy making is imbued with a range of market-driven demands rather than informed by pedagogical principles is shared by many in the literature (Ainley, 1999; Simmons, 2010; Hursh, 2001; Jankowski & Provezis, 2014). Bourdieu believes that there is an alternative and this will come about by opposing and resisting neoliberalism. There are possibilities to have an education system which is based on intellectual participation rather than economic efficiency (1998).

Although Ofsted has stopped grading individual lessons, institutions are still given a grade after a full inspection. The 'requires improvement' grade has been replaced with 'inadequate', and 'satisfactory' has been changed to 'requires improvement'. This is rather bizarre; how on earth can the delivery of any provision not require improvement? Even in 'outstanding' practice, there is still room for improvement (Ball, 2015a). The goalposts change constantly and for the colleges that the government agencies deem are failing, usually a new management team is appointed after each inspection – a management that is more committed to enforcing surveillance and standardisation measures in 'underperforming' organisations. 'Every time some expert, public official, or advocate declares that' some schools or colleges 'are in crises, stop, listen and see what he or she is selling' (Ravitch in Lea, 2011).

Unlike HE, FE has traditionally been seen as for the people from the working classes preparing for less aspirational jobs. In the context of globalisation, this sector is therefore easy prey for policy makers. It is relatively more straight forward to introduce new curriculum offers which can be

adapted to suit the economic needs of a globalised world in an FE college than in a university. The demands of increased global competition in the market can be met through the development of skills that learners need to work in a globalised economy. It is for those reasons FE has always been subject to government interventions and regulations.

The grading system was designed to label colleges and bring them to a position where it becomes impossible for them to refuse the involvement of private companies, making them feel obliged to offer 'demand-led' provisions (UCU, 2007). The emphasis has shifted from educating students and liberally developing their critical thinking to reducing the skills deficit in the market. All of this appears to be based on the ideology that we should create a workforce that is skilled to perform tasks that strengthen the corporate sector and, more importantly, is skilled to do it in a timely and efficient manner. Another important point is that in the context of lifelong learning, one is unlikely to have enough or satisfactory level of skills to deal with continuous technological advances in the market. Under this system, which is based on never-ending demands, teachers are allowed, and are good enough, to teach, but cannot really be upskilled to the level that is required by continual structural changes in policies and practices in the sector (Beighton, 2015).

Having a set of skills is not seen as a resource that brings knowledge and action together; it has been redefined as something that improves ability to reproduce 'performance related tasks'. This makes it easier for senior management teams to gauge the 'success' of workers (teachers in this case), as opposed to assigning the role of educator to teachers whereby they are able to use their knowledge and expertise to transform the way students use their minds diversely by encouraging their critical thinking skills (Ainley, 1999). This is the demand of commercialised market forces behave towards 'FE as the answer to perceived skill shortages and as the solution to questions of economic competitiveness and social inclusion' (Simmons, 2010, p. 11). Various forms of policy interventions are introduced and publicised in the name of 'enhanced quality and better student experience but are inseparable from a continued desire for lifelong learning to guarantee economic effectiveness and institutional accountability through increasingly detailed measurement of its own input'. A sense of an economic enterprise seems to be embedded in the values that serve to explain the predominant ethos of 'learning' promoted as something that can be bought, sold or traded (Beighton, 2015, p. 15). The lack of academic capital is the Achilles heel here. The weaker the academic capital, the more an institution is prone to running its operation according to powerholders' dictation (Bourdieu, 1988).

Simmons (2010) notes that neo-liberalism is based on some assumptions about intelligence hierarchies among individuals, and how State should deal with people with different levels of abilities. Of course, this view does not take the notion of cultural capital into account. In other words, it ignores peoples' income and the opportunities available to them in the grand scheme of things. There is a widespread supposition that some people live in deprivation because they are either lazy or not good enough to survive in a highly competitive and profit-driven society. State-power is used to create and increase competition. These market-based principles are imposed on FE too; for example, the 1988 Education Reform Act, the 1992 FE and HE Act and 2000 Learning and Skills Act can all be seen as an attempt to 'to make FE providers responsive to the market and the discipline of competition' (ibid). The concept of knowledge economy is embedded in existing educational policies and it dictates the type of knowledge and skills learners from a certain section of society need to acquire. Colleges are 'not evaluated for whether students become liberally educated citizens but whether they become economically productive workers' (Hursh, 2001, p. 2). Free markets will not be able to exist without human capital, and for that reason; highly skilled labour is essential for the global marketplace. Now this makes it easier to understand why it has become 'fashionable to criticise education as failing to deliver the skilled workforce deemed necessary for the knowledge economy'. This is also evident in policy documents such as Leitch Report of 2006. (Simmons, 2010, p. 15).

The above changes have all contributed to the relatively low status of Further Education compared to schools and universities (see Daley *et al.*, 2015). This situation is not significantly different from the standing of vocational education in other developed countries. For example, in Australia, the reduction in public providers' funding is a consequence of the marketisation of vocational education and this situation has made it difficult for providers to achieve traditional, social objectives (Wheelahan, 2016). Vocational education is viewed as a 'second, poor or last resort choice for school students' due to its low standing (Billett et al, 2020, p. 292). In Denmark, a minority of students enrol on vocational courses, as the sector lacks the prestige of more general secondary education (Aarkrog, 2020). Similarly, vocational schools in Israel are mainly comprised of learners from lower social classes (Barak and Shoshana, 2020). These comparative examples highlight the low status and esteem of vocational routes internationally, a position which is arguably the result of, or supported by, government policies in the English context as well (Young and Hordon, 2020).

The sociological infrastructure leaves FE with students who are believed to be 'uncompetitive' so therefore only capable of doing NVQs and other low-end certificates and diplomas. FE 'customers' are not entitled to have 'powerful knowledge' and the 'service providers' are not allowed to deliver it. Further Education is a complex environment; it '*is now running ever faster down the wrong road*' [emphasis in original] (Coffield, 2006 in Simmons, 2010, p. 19). 'It is subject to high levels of state regulation and interventions; and teaching and learning are increasingly impoverished and utilitarian. In the high class stratified terrain of English education, FE is, more than ever, positioned firmly at the lower end of the institutional hierarchy' (Simmons and Thompson, 2008 in Simmons, 2010, p.19).

2.1.2.   McDonaldisation

Ritzer (2011) uses the term McDonaldisation to describe the way principles of the fast-food chain have influenced the society we live in. This includes organisational strategies based on efficiency, predictability and calculability. It involves spending as little money as possible to carry out a range of multiple tasks in a measurable manner, so that success or failure are easy to determine. It also assumes that consistency and uniformity in practice on the part of the practitioners bring similar results. The system seeks control, aiming for stability by enforcing policies of reproduction and conformity. Although there is an attempt to keep the system humanised by leaving the door open for some improvisatory variations, there is no room for any sort of subversion (Gray and Block, 2012).

Since teachers are not in charge of the real or powerful knowledge, new regulations could be used for deskilling as they separate practitioners 'from a direct relationship to the means of production by scientific, technical, and engineering knowledge' (Marx, 1976 in Gray and Block, 2012, p. 124). Their role is not to produce knowledge but to deliver it efficiently and in ways that are measurable and predictable. This is ensured through a system of quality assurance which uses observations as a key mode of regulation. It is this point that I explain further in the following section.

2.2. Quality assurance and observation policies and practices in FE

Quality assurance is a neoliberal conception. It originated in the field of industrial production and then was used in service industries before becoming part of educational organisations. The main aim in industry was to increase levels of productivity and efficiency by using an inspection system of quality control through which errors were identified and plans to rectify mistakes were developed (Heyworth, 2013). 'In trying to grasp the concept of quality in education, one starting point is to look for a definition. Theoreticians have struggled and come up with a variety of definitions, including quality being defined by the degree to which set objectives are achieved, added value, fitness for purpose, and client satisfaction' (Thomas 2003, p. 232). One of the major interventions of quality assurance schemes in teaching manifested itself as classroom observations which have been used 'formatively to provide feedback and performance or to model particular teaching approaches' and have been 'increasingly appropriated as a policy tool with a new focus on teacher accountability and performativity' (Gleeson *et al.*, 2015).

> This focus cannot be de-contextualised from the wider proliferation of managerialism in FE as a whole, though the decision to hand over the remit for inspecting the sector to Ofsted and the subsequent introduction of the Common Inspection framework (CIF) were significant milestones in crystallising this shift over the last decade. In this short space of time, observation has come to be regarded as arguably the most important source of evidence, along with student achievement, on which judgements about the quality of teaching and learning are based, both externally for agencies like Ofsted, and internally for FE institutions, as much of the performance data collection by them is invariably done with Ofsted in mind.

(O'Leary, 2014 in Gleeson *et al.*, 2015, p. 82).

Apart from classroom observations, other quality assurances measures include audits of planning documents, self-evaluation in CPD sessions, appraisals, scrutiny of success rates, student fora and surveys and internal and external verification procedures. The goal is to measure teachers'

performance and provide guidelines that help teachers to measure themselves. 'Collegiality is replaced with competition, and autonomy is replaced with bounded (and calculable) expectations, providing the means through which teachers (and their supervisors) can know their ranks relative to their peers. This process not only changes the teacher's behaviour, but it also changes the teacher' (Holloway and Brass, 2018, p. 3).

Stephen Ball's (2003) influential work on education policy describes contemporary education reforms based on three policy technologies: markets, managerialism and performativity. Market technologies function to promote competition at individual and school levels, relying on quality indicators for internal and external stakeholders to make value-judgments and comparisons. Management technologies function to manage behaviour, promoting self-discipline and a team spirit mentality that encourages personal sacrifice for the betterment of the organization. Performance technologies function to re-orient teacher behaviour to a set of quality indicators, while providing the ontological frameworks for teachers to know how to be good teachers' (Ball, 2003).

At present the process of quality assurance around teaching practices revolves around results and evidence-based practices. For example, questions such as what will students learn, by when they will learn it, how would we know they have learned, how have they moved from one unit to another, how many passed their exams, lie at the centre of observation practices. It is important to note that there is evidence to suggests that there are a range of factors that influence teachers' observation grades such as students' background and household inco me, teachers' experience, classroom context and students' performance and score in initial assessment (Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor, 2006; Kalogrides and Loeb, 2013; Kalogrides, Loeb, and Beteille, 2013). One study found maths teachers were six times more likely to be given a top rating for their teaching if they were teaching top-set students rather than less able students (Steinberg & Garrett, 2016).

It is argued that the contemporary policies on teaching, learning and assessment do not seem to encompass the above-mentioned factors to a great degree. Some argue that in a neoliberal society, everything is calculated in terms of its financial viability; this includes education. A society wherein 'collective interests are replaced by competitive relations ... we cease to be a community of scholars

and rather we relate to one another in a complex, overlapping set of competitors' operating at a 'site' in which 'knowledge has exchange value' (Ball, 2015b, pp. 259-260).

Through the reception of an idea of quality linked to financial viability and compliance in education, the introduction of observations into teaching practices has been used as a key element in the TLA policies of FE colleges. In the following section, I will draw on literature that provides a general sense of the rationale behind this.

2.2.1. Historical and sociological context of observations: a brief overview

Rarely have educationists acknowledged the way the concept of 'observation', in teaching and learning has evolved, in a sense that it may no longer be limited to a case of 'classroom observation'. One of the key points reiterated in this thesis is that classroom observations are now only one aspect of observation repertoires used to assess the quality of teaching practices. It is for that reason that I will begin by undertaking a review of the relevant literature on classroom observations. At the same time, the discussion in this section broadens out into an exploration of a variety of contemporary issues considered in literature, which are seemingly linked to standardisation and regulation practices that are products of different strands of quality improvement agendas; therefore, they can be classified as 'observation' practices in a Foucauldian sense.

Classroom observations have traditionally been seen as an integral part of teacher education. Clinical supervision is a popular method for scrutinizing teachers' performance; it is based on direct observation of the process of teaching in the classroom as it happens. (Gaies and Bowers, 1997). The term, clinical supervision, in education dates back to 1969 when Goldhammer used it to delineate the process of improving teaching knowledge and skills. This rationale was based on improving teaching behaviour by focusing on the strategies stemmed from the observed events in the classroom. Cogan, then, developed a comprehensive cycle of supervision as a part of his proposal for educational reforms in the United States (Cogan, 1973).

Along with the other quality assurance measures, classroom observations were made an essential

tool to ensure and maintain high pedagogical standards. Mainstream educational establishments and private institutions had been using the process rigorously in all curriculum areas. By the early nineties, classroom observations had become 'far more common than' than they ever were' (Wragg, 1994, p. 1). Of course, ELT (English Language Teaching) has not been any exception in this regard. Although there was not enough literature on quality in language teaching until the late nineties (White, 1998), the situation began to change in the following years. The British Association for State English Language Teaching (BASELT) decided to focus on quality in its October 2001 conference (Thomas, 2003).

In the state sector, the phenomenon of quality is linked to success rates, retention and students' future career progression. Exam results are seen as a reflection of the quality of teaching; therefore, classroom observations permeate deep into the heart of policies aimed to improve lessons. 'Public money has to be accounted for...' the 'public needs to be assured that its money is well spent. The means used to provide this accountability is quality'. Apart from the other areas, a comprehensive Ofsted inspection closely looks at 'the teaching in action', and 'these visits can be demanding and stressful' in many ways' (ibid., p. 237)

The process of clinical supervision was initially meant to promote better learning and effective teaching and it aimed to 'reduce the discrepancy between *actual* teaching behaviour and *ideal* teaching behaviour' (Acheson and Gall, 1980 in Gaies and Bowers, 1997, p. 169).

Until 2014/15, Ofsted used graded observations as a key tool to assess teaching and learning in schools and FE colleges. The performance of teachers was assessed on a 1 to 4 continuum wherein 1 was 'outstanding', 2 meant 'good', 3 was seen a lesson that 'required improvement' and 4 was deemed 'inadequate'. The reliability of this measuring mechanism was called into question by Matt O'Leary who produced a detailed study of the role and nature of lesson observations in the English education system. The study found that the teachers were discontented with the way they were assessed via observation.

> This dissatisfaction was particularly targeted at graded models of observation,
> which have become the norm in FE over the last two decades. These were repeatedly
> criticized by a significant majority of participants for being little more than a 'box-

ticking' exercise and, in some instances, a 'disciplinary stick' with which 'to beat staff'. In relation to this, graded observations were also identified by many respondents as being a major cause of increased levels of stress and anxiety amongst teaching staff.

(O'Leary, 2013, p. 2).

However, the study did acknowledge the need to tackle poor teaching by moving away from the model which used observation grades as the main, and sometimes the only, indicator of teacher quality. Ideas underpinning O'Leary's work indicate a 'need to explore alternative approaches and to move away from current normalised models of graded observations driven by performance management agendas', and these alternative routes entail observations with a developmental rather than judgmental focus carried out in a more collaborative and collegial environment with the aim of improving teaching practices (ibid, p. 2).

This research is said to have resulted in a shift in Ofsted policy with the removal of graded observations from their common inspection framework (Offord, 2015). However, some FE colleges continued to use graded observations as part of their internal quality assurance action plans.

2.2.2.   Politics of accountability and transparency

In this context, observations can be viewed as a technique 'of power under an accountability apparatus where a focus is on clear outcomes for students… and goals related to efficiency become normalising processes for self-regulation of' individual and 'institutional behaviour' (Ferlie, Musselin *et al.*, 2008 in Jankowski & Provezis, 2014, pp. 477-178). It is assumed that users will engage with information to make informed choices, but behind the guise of transparency is the idea that there is an imperative to record, document and attach performance targets to ensure responsibility (O'Brien *et al.*, 2012 in Jankowski & Provezis, 2014, p. 478).

When learning is seen through the marketised lens of production improvement, colleges have to justify their operation according to market-based conceptions of accountability. Bell (1991) notes

that the idea of 'leadership' comes from the business lexicon. College principals are now known as CEOs who 'spend most of their time trying to ensure their college's financial viability' (Dennis, 2016, p. 117). Their remit has been redefined and expanded as financial leadership is the most important aspect of their job role. 'The allocation of budgetary responsibilities to professionals require them to calculate their actions not in the esoteric languages of their own expertise but by translating them into costs and benefits that can be given an accounting value' (Rose, 1999, p. 152). Observations can be seen as a 'technique and procedure designed to direct the conduct of men' [sic] (Foucault, 1982b, p. 37). What Foucault means is that practices including professional practices can be controlled, directed, enabled, restricted through the regulatory function of the gaze. Power operates upon the body by making it the subject of its 'gaze'. Observation as a disciplinary practice controls people by making it necessary and desirable for them and turns them into docile bodies. It is in this sense observation is part of the technologies of control.

The government funding mechanism means that colleges ought to compete for student numbers ('bums on seats' is a commonly used phrase in the sector) and achievement rates. These figures, made available to the government and its agencies, have a major impact on how these institutions are allocated funds and how they are graded during inspections. 'The focus of institutions competing against each other for students and thus increasing their quality ignores the diversity of institutional types, regional settings and students that institutions serve' (Birnbaum, 1983 in Jankowski and Provezis, 2014, p. 482). This is similar to the consequence teachers face when the type of students they face impacts their observation grades as seen in Steinberg and Garrett's research mentioned above. 'By providing information on student learning to potential consumers, institutions…are responding to forms of neoliberal governmentality' (Jankowski and Provezis, 2014, p. 482). The criteria based on pedagogical logics and social principles has been replaced with economic priorities. Modern governments do not intervene 'directly upon organisational processes or by relying upon professional expertise'. They 'act indirectly upon the actions of these autonomous entities, by focusing upon results: setting targets, promulgating standards, monitoring outputs, allocating budgets, undertaking audits' (Rose, 1999, p. 146).

Whilst FE practitioners might be interested in what 'transparency' entails in this context, philosophers such as Michal Foucault would seek to address the background and impact of

transparency on organisations and individual bodies. 'Being transparent in response to a market and being transparent in response to institutional obligations to the public' are two completely different approaches. Since it is 'the economic rationality approach pushing for transparency' in the existing political arena, individuals 'will continue to alter their practices and regulate themselves within a discourse which does not honour the social contract and requires them to be reactive to changing accountability demands' (Jankowski and Provezis, 2014, p. 484).

The system of controlling the educational process is given an acceptable face 'through a process of *governing by and through the market* [emphasis in original] with an accent on the reform of public services, investment in human capital and the creation of "citizen consumers"' (Peters, 2010, p. 18). The construction of self-governing subjects tends to readjust the emancipatory potential of individuals and they are controlled through the freedoms they are able to exercise (Selmeczi, 2015, pp. 1079- 1080). Edwards (2002) refers to these practices of governing as Thatcherite neo-liberalism in which 'freedom has less to do with emancipation and more to do with "virtuous disciplined and responsible autonomy"' (Dean, 1999, p. 155 in Edwards, 2002, p. 357).

2.2.3. Managing through freedom: the ascendency of the existing paradigm

Examining connections between the economic model of education, performance indicators, surveillance, monitoring data and accountability helps us grasp the ethos of capitalist competition within neoliberal ideology that provides the theoretical basis for the whole apparatus of governmentality in FE. (Ainley, 1999; Simmons, 2010; Hursh, 2001; Jankowski and Provezis, 2014). Foucault has discussed the operation of disciplinary and regulatory power over human life by using the terms 'governing' and 'government'. As opposed to 'sovereign power that exercises the right to kill when its sovereignty is challenged and threatened, governing according to the concept of governmentality' requires the management of population through freedom (Rhee, 2013, p. 564). 'In this sense, the practice of government leads to consideration of the multitude of techniques, schemes, structures and ideas deliberately mobilised in attempting to direct or influence the conduct of others' (Doherty, 2007, p. 196). This is what he means by the "conduct of conduct".

Speaking about the Technical and Further Education Bill on 14th November 2016, Justine Greening, then the Secretary of State for Education, told parliament about her strategic priorities that should inform the design and delivery of Further Education. She said the bill 'explains how important it is for employers to play a big role so that the qualifications the young people obtain equip them with the skills and knowledge that they need to enter the job market successfully' (UK Parliament, 2016). This political-economic rationality requires FE colleges to 'choose' options from the given ideological paradigm or readjust their choices, so they are in line with business principles. Educators are 'free' to run the operational side of things by demonstrating 'best practice' through assessment of and for learning. This freedom, however, is used as a tool in a 'normalisation' process where economics defines what is considered rational human behaviour. In other words, neo-liberalism is in the centre of strategic planning in terms of governmental practices aimed at introducing educational reforms. (Jankowski and Provezis, 2012).

2.2.4.   Governmentality

The concept of governmentality can be seen as a key strategy used in disciplinary power mechanisms whereby the notion of power and the powerful state is not divorced from 'the people'. '... in order to produce a healthy and effective state, a healthy and productive population was required. The population came to be understood as a resource, and the role of the state was to manage (or govern) "the population" and "the individual" was required' (Harman, 2007, p. 24).

Foucault coined the term 'biopower' to describe the ways modern states regulate their subjects. Rather than seeing people as victims, as in a conception of sovereign power. Foucault first discussed the term in 1976 in *The History of Sexuality* Volume 1. He showed that power does not always oppress, and it can be productive and empowering. Biopower entails the techniques of controlling and disciplining bodies, but since it is a complex system, it enables the workers 'to resist oppressive practices ... and to see that resistance as a political act' (Mills, 2005, p. 71). Biopower is 'used for analysing, controlling, regulating and defining the human body and its behaviour' (Danaher *et al.*, 2000 in Harman, 2007, p. 25). To understand this Foucauldian conception, we need to contrast biopower with sovereign power. The primary function of sovereign power lay in its ability to decide life and death, and its prerogative to enforce death when sovereignty was at stake. Biopower replaced this form of violent power in the West by employing regulatory techniques with an aim to control

the population through effective administration of bodies. The techniques used to achieve these objectives could be described as biopolitics. This is part of the disciplinary power operation wherein the subjugation of bodies is achieved through knowledge and calculated management of life.

To exercise power, these disciplinary technologies are used to produce a body that is easy to influence, persuade and control. This results in the emergence of regulatory regimes that observe measure and shape an individual's behaviour by employing disciplinary technologies in factories, colleges, and prisons to regulate the conduct of workers, teachers, prisoners and so on (ibid). The disciplinary technologies allow for the socially accepted definitions of 'normal' and 'abnormal' behaviour whereby disciplinary institutions use various techniques of surveillance and normalisation to monitor 'abnormalities'. A person is turned into 'a case' and more information is gathered about them – knowledge leads to better governance (Rose, 1989 in Harman, 2007). In this complex web of power relations, disciplinary technologies seek to impose their own standard as the only one that is acceptable as 'normal' (ibid, p. 26). This practice, as opposed to a sovereign view of power, enables the operation of power to remain so subtle as to be difficult to analyse or describe. Perhaps, that is precisely why it has been so successful in modern times. Foucault argues that power 'is tolerable only on a condition that it mask[s] the substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanism' (1998, p. 86).

The term governmentality appeared in Foucault's fourth lecture of the series 'Security, Territory, Population' in 1978. The notion of governmentality was not limited to the contemporary state governance; he extended his inquiry to discuss general power relations. 'I have proposed to call governmentality . . . the way in which one conducts the conduct of men [sic] . . . a proposed analytical grid for . . . relations of power' (Foucault, 2008, p. 186). The 'analytical grid' includes different forms of knowledge used in the mechanisms of governance and the process that governmentalized the western world in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By incorporating historical processes, apparatuses of security and political economy, he took the discussion of power from the context of disciplinary institutions to the realm of the state.

> just as for the prison we tried to go behind penitentiary institutions in the strict
> sense so as to seek out the general economy of power, can we carry out the same

reversal for the state? . . . Is it possible to place the modern state in a general technology of power that ensured its mutations, development, and functioning?

(Foucault, 2007, p. 120)

Technologies of power control and influence the conduct of individuals. The discussion on governmentality is part of Foucault's genealogical analysis which is an extension rather than a replacement of disciplinary mechanisms. The shift from the discussion of productive practices within disciplinary regimes to analysing techniques of modern government shows strategic and political aspects of power that were not previously covered in his work on the shift from sovereign to disciplinary power. He argued that the state is not an oppressive institution; it encompasses many different types of practices informed by various forms of knowledge which are used for the welfare of its population. The state uses different tactics to achieve a range of objectives which 'cannot be effectively achieved by means of the law' (ibid., p. 99). Governmentality is therefore the study of the emergence of different modes of complex relationships between knowledge, power and government. There are many governments within the state that have their own discursive practices which have nothing universal about them. Modern governments are not judged on the basis of whether they abide by the divine rules, but their ability to run their operation based on scientific realities. Politics and economics are part of that scientific knowledge (Oksala, 2013). Governmentality is a useful concept to discuss the tactics and strategies used in FE. Quality improvement measures are an attempt to governmentalise teaching practices.

There are mechanisms in place that largely keep senior management invisible from the teaching scene, which gives teachers a sense of autonomy; however, they are obliged to conform to ethics – not in a traditional moral sense, but ethics behind 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1988c, p. 16). This code of ethics could be seen 'as means by which individuals come to construe, decipher, act upon themselves in relation to the true and false, the permitted and the forbidden, the desirable and undesirable' (Rose, 1989, p. 153).

In this system, people have some choice to write part of their own script and decide how they choose to engage in professional practices without having an ultimate power. The forces in power modify and reshape their practices so that everything is on the right path and in the right direction. From a

Marxist perspective, this is a false assumption, as choices of this kind create a trap with ultimate consequences that are far from emancipatory and that form the roots of oppression. Bourdieu has used the term 'misrecognition' to describe this Marxian idea of 'false consciousness'. Foucault, however, explicitly rejects the conception wherein power is always repressive, top down and centralised. Rather than seeking to find the pre-eminence of the economy in the operation of power, he was interested in connections 'between a discourse and the whole play of economic, political and social practices and how different practices 'were made to appear "rational" ... how particular discourses came to be formed'. What informs our understanding of 'the rational' and 'the sane', and what type of behaviour would be deemed inappropriate, unreasonable inadequate or mad (Olssen, et al 2004, p. 19). Foucault's epistemology is focused upon how power is dispensed and exercised and the political and social implication of the concept of power-knowledge; how knowledge and power are always interconnected (ibid).

A governmentality analysis vis-à-vis education policy involves 'exploring what is said, what is not said and what cannot be said... discourse and power are closely linked. Power can be exercised by deploying particular discourses' (Ninnes and Burnett, 2003, p. 282). Foucault argues that observations, examination and normalisation are the key techniques of disciplinary power. Since these are not neutral practices, they work through a norm that helps classify, endorse and exclude individuals. 'Normalising judgement serves to create a distinction between "good-bad", "normal-abnormal", operating through rewards as well as punishments' (Foucault, 1979 in Edwards, 2002, p. 361). An observation with a 'bad' outcome could be seen as a form of 'the programmatic and strategic deployment of coercion' as Rose (1999, p. 10) views it. He argues that practices based on oppression, constraint, domination and coercion, have not gone missing in modern times, neither have certain sections of our society stopped being the victims of coercive tactics of control. Coercion, in fact, 'has been reshaped upon the ground of freedom, so that particular kinds of justification have to be provided for such practices... for example, the argument that the constraint of the few is a condition for the freedom of the many' or 'limited coercion is necessary to shape or reform pathological individuals' (ibid, p. 10).

The disciplinary system designed to shape people's conduct seems less concerned with education and more with politics. The overall rationale behind contemporary bio power is 'to measure the

costs of, and place value on, all forms of human activity' – educational policy agendas are no exception here. It is therefore not just privatisation that comes with the strong state, it is also introducing robust modes of control and regulation' and classroom observations have 'become a new authoritarian discourse of state management and control' (Olssen *et al.*, 2004, p. 172).

The sector no longer has the vocabulary that enables it to think and talk about itself in terms of' any 'ethical desire. Instead, these discussions have been replaced with the ritualised politics of critical reflection… For college leaders, what matters is being outstanding; the future viability of their college depends on it. And being outstanding means complying with the detailed specification bestowed by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) criteria that change on a triennial basis' (Dennis, 2016, p. 126). The education policy has political implications; the link between policymaking and politics leads to interventions with the purpose of shaping individual conduct – the reengineering of power and the knowledge of how it is exercised with liberty makes this style of governing possible (Doherty, 2007, p. 200).

2.2.5.   The underlying rationale of a neoliberal logic

The model of governmentality based on disciplinary biopower takes its strength from neoliberalism. Measurable target setting, surveillance, economic inequality is part of the price one has to pay for the rule or law, economic freedom and individual liberty. In education, the predetermined goals are also defined by the skills society needs and financial gains. Students are expected to compete with each other for better jobs in the same way as colleges are encouraged to compete for more funding. In educational neoliberalism, everything has to be planned in advance so the targets can be set and individuals as well as institutions can be held accountable against the responsibilities that were assigned to them. These principles are extended to classroom practices and how observations and audits are used to measure the efficacy of teaching. As d'Agnese (2019, p. 700) puts it:

> the testing regime, performance-based accountability measures, and the economics-based vision of education operate together effectively, reinforcing one another and thus creating a kind of closed loop that renders inconsistent and unfeasible the ability to consider alternatives… Thus, educationally speaking, the neoliberal educational commitment to the right skills… for tomorrow's economy and to student

achievement and preparation for global competitiveness is not just a means by which schooling is increasingly reduced to training for particular skills and the whole range of human potentialities is narrowed down to what is functional in the here and now.

It is in this sense that a market-based vision of education fits well with reductionist approaches whereby everyone should be able to use similar procedures and produce the same results as seen in McDonaldisation. This uniformity makes the disciplinary style of governing possible, for there is no need to put an emphasis on any critical engagement with knowledge and incorporate the principles of emergence found in a relational approach such as complexity theory. The lines of action based on reductionism do not cater for uniqueness and how many 'it depends' there may be. Educational outcomes and processes have to be made predictable and this eventually works to mystify 'the open range of possibilities that education entails' and reassign the way teaching and learning coexists with unpredictability that is predominantly associated with the principles of complexity (ibid, p. 707).

In the next section of this chapter, I will therefore begin by outlining the origins and distinctive aspects of complexity theory and draw a parallel between them and Michel Foucault's archaeological and genealogical analysis. I will then highlight the significance of this approach in understanding the very nature of FE operations in relation to the college that is being used as a case study for this investigation. The issue of complexity, we may learn in the following section of this study, viewed through a Foucauldian lens could potentially raise questions around the methods related to reductionism and how they may not be compatible with educational practices that are inherently fluid, non-linear, messy, incidental and unpredictable.

2.3. What is complexity?

Rene Thom's catastrophe theory from the 1970s explained the role of small effects in triggering unexpected and quick changes in society. However, Thom's ideas did not provide any explanation of the processes by which these changes are brought about. In the 1980s, chaos theory developed - in the context of market economics - with more capacity to gain deeper understanding of fluid systems wherein despite having essential insights into their initial states, outcomes of those systems remained unpredictable. This theory does not offer any clear principles to understand social bodies

in their entirety. Thinking further about the kind of themes offered by catastrophe and chaos theories, complexity theory appropriates ideas, such as 'self-organisation' and 'emergence', to understand the nature of the interaction of various parts which eventually lead to order and stability. 'The main themes in complexity theory have been studied for more than a hundred years by physicists who evolved a tool kit of concepts and techniques to which complexity studies have added barely a handful of new items' (Ball, 2003, p. 5).

Complex systems are composed of entities with several components that are interlinked. A tropical rainforest with a wide range of distinct species interacting with each other and adapting to ever-changing conditions is a typical example of complex systems. For example, tropical rainforests are known for their infertility and poor soils wherein an acidity difference between the soil and the roots allows the absorption of nutrients into the roots of the plants. Some rain is intercepted by trees, and some reaches the ground, so the nutrients are washed away as they are usually close to the surface of the soil. Dead animal and plant material are rapidly decomposed by humid conditions which then create more nutrients that enter the soil allowing the growth of vegetations. This complex interdependence is a good example of how interaction amongst interconnected sub-systems at various levels ensures a transition from one condition to another in recurrent life cycles of plants and animals. Markets with a countless range of buyers and sellers, economies with hierarchical structures in different departments and industries and big organisations with hierarchies of workers are some of the other examples of complex systems (Holland, 2014).

Any small change in these complex processes can lead to outcomes that may not be proportional to their initial states or actions that triggered those changes. For example, deforestation will result in complete infertility of the land. Another example is how one decision by US banks, to engage in hedge fund trading demanding more mortgages, led to the global financial crisis of 2008. These factors impacting on change and continuity are elucidated by the notion of *emergence* in complexity theory. 'Given a significant degree of complexity in a particular environment ... new properties and behaviours emerge that are not contained in the essence of the constituent elements, or able to be predicted from a knowledge of initial conditions.' A prime example of such chaotic behaviours can be seen in 'a hurricane in the Caribbean' resulting from 'the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Argentina' (Mason, 2008, p. 3). Complex systems however have an ability to adapt to changing

circumstances by using different strategies as the changes take place and then self-organise into various patterns as we have seen in the rainforest example.

Therefore, it is these organisational features that make certain systems complex. Beighton argues that complexity is not synonymous with things being complicated. 'Dynamic change is at the heart of complexity, but here it does not mean that the situation is complicated, difficult, or unpredictable, although it implies all of these things ... complex open systems are in disequilibrium and are thus *machinic*' [emphasis in original] (Beighton, 2016, p. 87). Since components in these systems are not independent, their existence is relational. In other words, the presence, workings and continuance of individual parts can only be understood in terms of their dynamic relations with other parts in the system as seen in an internal mechanism of, for example, a watch (ibid).

2.3.1.   SLA research, ELT and the notion of complexity

Marshal states that our everyday perceptions of the world have been largely dominated by mechanistic discourses and Newtonian Physics.

> Sir Isaac Newton gave us classical physics, the laws of gravitation and mechanics,
> and a description of a deterministic world. This Newtonian worldview also
> profoundly influenced our psyche, our beliefs, our behaviour, and consequently,
> how we designed our institutions. We have been obsessed with linear systems and
> their effect has controlled almost every dimension of our culture.

> (Marshal, 1996, p. 1)

Bowers highlights the relevance of this position in the world of ELT.

> ...the prevailing metaphors... for language learning... are essentially hierarchical and
> they are linear. They at once guide and constrain the way we think about teaching,
> learning, assessment, language, the teacher, the learner.

> (Bowers, 1990, p. 128)

So, is the process of SLA as simple and orderly as implied by Newtonian discourse? Lightbown and Spada gainsay that this really is the case. They conclude that although exposure to the language is important, students do not learn everything they are taught. When 'something is taught or made available in the input [it] does not mean learners will acquire it right away' (Lightbown and Spada, 2000, p. 169). The sequence of language development is natural, and learners will only learn certain features 'when they are developmentally 'ready' (ibid., p. 169). This position is not without precedent in English language teaching and applied linguistics. Ellis (1993), Terrell (1991), and Van Patten and Cadierno (1993) (all cited in Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p. 155) have all stressed that although explicit instruction has a role in facilitating intake, it 'will not likely result in immediate mastery of specific grammatical items'. We could assume that this is also true of other features of language acquisition. Therefore, despite the emphasis on having a linear approach to devise schemes of work and measurable learning outcomes, the process of language learning is not linear. As Larsen-Freeman puts it: 'learning linguistic items is not a linear process – learners do not master one item and then move on to another. In fact, the learning curve for a single item is not linear either' (1997, p. 151)

In Bower's (1990) view, we need to be able have the right metaphor in order to have a clear understanding of something. The right metaphor for the ELT classroom, in this school of thought, could be another chaotic and complex system; chaos, as defined by Mallows (2002), is 'order' without the element of predictability. In other words, complex systems have several components which interact with each other in a particular fashion, but their operation can only be described fully by their workings in the present. Pedagogically speaking, the proportional relationship between the target language input and output makes processes linear: this is not the case in ELT. The SLA literature tells us that what is taught in the classroom is not readily available to learners for communication; hence, it is a complex system.

Mallows' critique of contemporary ELT practice includes the futility of setting measurable aims for learners. When a teacher pre-selects discrete language items, learners are compelled to work on something which may bear little resemblance to their day-to-day needs. In fact, language teachers should have a reactive approach with enough room for students to explore what they feel is important. It is simply 'disorder' rather than 'order' that reflects the true nature of SLA (ibid).

Whilst Hill (2003, p. 176) agrees with Mallows' view of the proactive versus reactive approach, he seems reluctant to accept the notion of disorder as 'chaos does manifest some order' and it facilitates language acquisition. He too would prefer to avoid a return to linearity, though concludes that learners do need guidance to retrieve order from disorder. Complex systems appear to be working in a random fashion, but in fact their operation is systematic and leads to order which can be observed through a movement-to-movement change of positions within that system.

Within the existing observation model, SMART learning outcomes seek to assure observers that students will make progress and what exactly they will have learned by the end of a lesson. If learning processes are defined as 'complex', predicting outcomes based on initial data may seem problematic. Beighton's (2015, p. 17) discusses the well-known idea of "baker's transformation" - wherein 'initial conditions of a piece of dough, kneaded many times,' do not tell us anything about its possible future conditions or its end point - shows how this kind of analysis can be used to search for explanations around the predictability debate in education at a deeper level than those provided by Newtonian physics.

Various authors have discussed the benefits of classroom observations including their scope for assessing teaching styles and classroom management skills. Furthermore, they provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their good practice and things they need to work on. (Farrell, 2011; Murphy, 2013). Nevertheless, a few writers take issue with this position over procedural limitations and drawbacks; for instance, observers' lack of training, subjective approach and inability to revisit the same classroom on most occasions, which puts a question mark over the validity of the process (Copland, 2008; Hooton, 2008; Borg, 2006)

A key factor in the assessment of teaching practices is learner performance and how they respond to a teacher's input. This could be quite tricky if we consider authors such as Larsen-Freeman (2009, p. 585) who argues that 'acquisition and transfer are both problematic concepts within a complex system as it rejects a view of language as something that is taken in – a static commodity that one acquires and therefore possesses forever'. In her view, '...development is always happening... Although a learner's language production may not look qualitatively different from one time to the

next, a learner's language resources are always being updated quantitatively'. Based on this it appears that the quality assurance mechanisms may not be able to recognize when language output is not proportional to the input and, at times does not reflect the level of intake either. Not being able to make this distinction puts a question mark over the validity and reliability of how teaching is evaluated and how learning is measured. 'It is possible... that our view of development is obscured because our instruments are too blunt or that we are not looking in the right places' (ibid, p. 585).

2.3.2.   Predictability in lesson planning

Lesson plans are integral to the observation process as they are discussed at pre and post-observation meetings. The success of an observed lesson is hugely based on 'aims and objectives' stated in a plan; the observer also evaluates the nature and sequence of the activities devised to help teachers achieve those aims. It is, therefore, important for the teacher to word the learning objectives in a measurable fashion. These objectives, also called learning outcomes, are written as statements that begin with action verbs derived from Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning. Taxonomy of educational objectives is based on the framework elaborated by Bloom and his collaborators. It consisted of six major categories: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation (Armstrong, 2010). This approach originates from a rational-linear framework in which Tyler adopted an outcomes-oriented, transmissive approach to planning and delivering the input (Tyler, 1949 in Crabbe, 2003). It may seem reasonable to assume that in a framework such as this, there is little, if any, room for the 'reactive approach' which has been discussed previously. This approach, as it pertains to product rather than process, would also fail to 'account for the ways in which creativity might inspire further invention', according to Beighton (2015, p. 47).

Anderson (2015) posits that the existing practice in planning teaching 'is in conflict with how we know about how languages are learnt...' and '... how experienced teachers plan for and facilitate learning'. Therefore, it does not mirror the principles of a reactive approach which reflect 'how teachers prepare for and respond to the unpredictable events'. (ibid). Anderson shares Van Lier's (2004) viewpoint in this respect; Van Lier had postulated that the term 'affordance' should replace the term 'input' in language learning. The notion of affordance recognises the humanistic learning environment in which positive and effective 'learning opportunities' will take the place of 'learning outcomes. The terms 'learning outcomes and Learning objectives are used interchangeably in ELT.

'Current approaches to planning generally encourage teachers to describe what they expect all the learners to learn, rather than to speculate as to what the learners may achieve as individuals. The underlying assumption is that, for teachers to demonstrate their competence, they need to be able to describe and then force a specific, invariably undifferentiated types of learning upon all students in the class, after which they evaluate the degree to which they succeeded in meeting "their" aims.' (Anderson, 2015, pp. 230-231). Based on this, it would be fair to assume that the observation procedure in ELT is designed to assess the effectiveness of practitioners' teaching intentions in terms of controlled delivery and learning – something which, the literature tells us, is difficult to be controlled.

In the typical reductionist approach, different factors are taken separately to analyse learner performance in an isolated and linear manner. This line of assessment, though keeping 'us happily employed … does little to advance our understanding' of the interaction between several dimensions to effective teaching and learning and how these interactions change with time (Larsen-Freeman, 2009, p. 582).

As opposed to the 'analytical reductionist view', it is actually the principles of complexity theory that should inform this practice; this 'sees connections between individual or sets of variables within any system, on occasions, resisting explanation in terms of regularities or linear relationships' (Radford, 2006, p. 178). These intersections and connections are not necessarily permanent. A particular action may not necessarily represent a specific fact, and not everything can be reduced to something. The idea of reality has elasticity where the explanation of various connections carries a range of possibilities that are open to interpretation and reinterpretation (ibid).

In ELT literature, there have been calls for alternative methods with limited pre-defined structure. The teacher needs to utilise the 'Dogme moments' effectively by paying attention to what students are saying or are interested in; the grammar will, then, 'emerge naturally'. The teacher's main role is to draw students' attention to target forms but provide students feedback without overemphasizing the structure. The basic principle is that the language emerges naturally through interaction (Thornbury & Meddings, 2013). It goes without saying that a teacher needs to be well qualified and experienced in order to successfully operate 'in the position of the canoeist shooting

the rapids, continuously adapting in the face of unknown and unpredictable challenges and with sufficient information only to respond to the local and immediate' (Radford, 2006, p. 185).

The process of a Dogme lesson in its purist form can be described as follows:

Students decide (implicitly or explicitly) what they are going to discuss.

⬇

Different structures emerge naturally in real language use.

⬇

Students discuss the naturally emerged forms.

⬇

Teacher deals with the emerging language.

⬇

Very short grammar presentation based on what came from students

⬇

Students go back to free practice again.
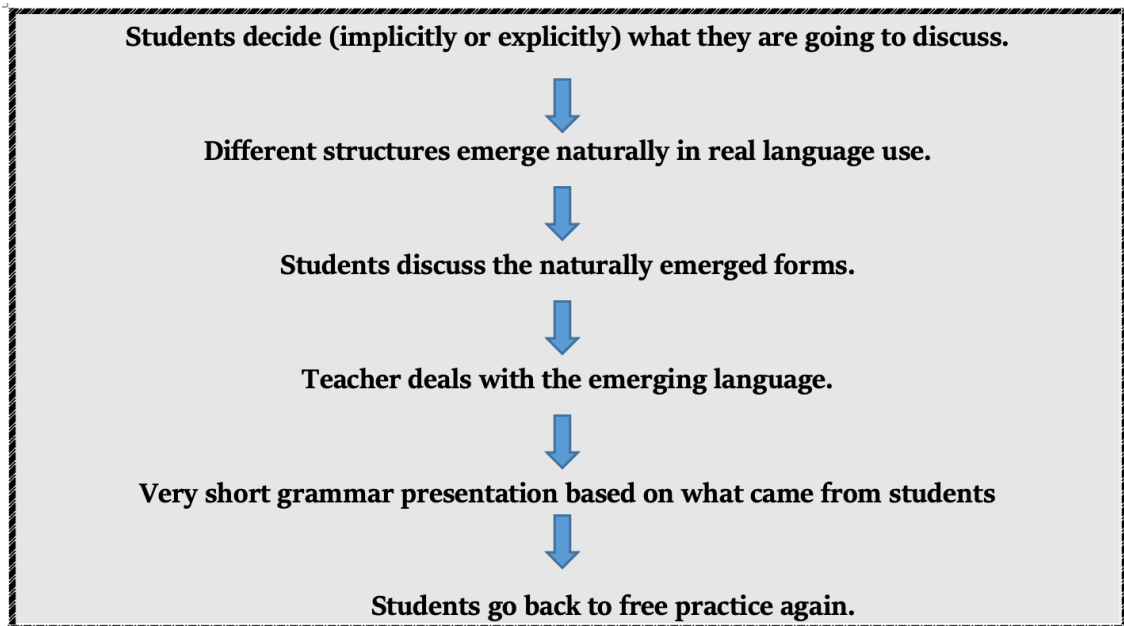
(Figure 1: Model based on Thornbury & Meddings, 2009)

This approach (Dogme in ELT) rejects the notion of using pre-selected materials based on any curriculum. The best target language exposure for students is the teacher. It is about creating the right conditions for learners to experiment with their own language and helps them feel comfortable in taking risks: this also creates 'scaffolding' opportunities for teachers where they can provide the necessary interactional support through heuristic routes (Thornbury, 2000).

Thornbury believes it is about restoring 'teaching to its pre-method "state of grace" when there was only a room with a few chairs, a blackboard, a teacher and some students, and where learning was jointly constructed out of the talk that evolved in that simplest, and most prototypical of situations' (2000 p. 2). Reclaiming this ecology can have power to generate practice that is meaningful in a dynamic and vibrant fashion – 'reclaiming is an adventure, both empirical and pragmatic, because it does not primarily mean taking back what was confiscated, but rather learning what it takes to inhabit again what was devastated' (Stengers, 2008, p. 58).

If we look at this position from a broader perspective, it is in agreement with complexity theorists who look at educational systems as 'ecologies of practice' (Stronach et al, 2002 in Radford, 2006) 'where interactions between different characteristics and elements are difficult to predict with the kind of accuracy that is ... associated with the 'economies of practice' (Radford, 2006, p. 178).

Larsen-Freeman draws a number of parallels between complex nonlinear systems and second language acquisition. In order to better understand the activity of SLA, she gives an example of a tree – the way that the trunk of a tree divides into smaller and smaller branches and twigs where 'it is impossible to predict the exact dimensions of a tree or where the branches (if any) will radiate from the trunk'. If they had leaves, 'we could not predict how many leaves there would be growing from which twigs on which branches etc.' (1997, p. 146). Such an analogy helps to reinforce the complex and multi-faceted nature of language teaching. A lesson with prefabricated stage plans, which are devised to teach students 'target language', does not manifest the reality of the dynamic process of SLA. The term target language itself is problematic and 'misleading because there is no endpoint to which the acquisition can be directed. The target is always moving' (ibid, p. 146).

The internal and external observation authorities form their policies based on analytical and reductionist views which assume that prescriptive directions will produce desired outcomes.

> Development is gradual and happens in the context of a high degree of practitioner
> control. The whole experience of the school can be reduced to constituent elements
> ... and individual learners can improve along clearly defined trajectories. Little
> attention is paid ... to how schools actually function, but rather more on how they
> are made to function and the role of educational research in this process
>
> (Radford, 2006, p. 180).

The relationship among different variables, such as planning, delivery, input, intake, output and assessment is variable in its entirety due to its unpredictability and indeterminacy. These variables interact in a non-linear manner as 'the impact of any one set of variables upon any other is disproportionate... depending on local and temporary conditions' (Radford, 2008, p. 152). In an ELT

context, the SLA research also tells us that such variables interact with each other in a very complex and chaotic fashion. So 'teachers do not have control over all these factors'. (Lightbown and Spada, 2000, p. 169).

The existing observation policies foreground the features of reductionist approaches; therefore, use a blanket approach to assess the quality of teaching in a very determinate and representational way. This approach offers a specific product if the syllabus outlines are strictly followed. The official discourse of language teaching is open to scrutiny and discussion as the outcomes can be checked against the objectives set in the beginning of a language course. There are systematic action plans, and a clear rationale is provided for preplanned choices and decisions; for that reason, this view dominates the existing planning practices in educational settings. And 'perhaps for this reason', this 'perspective has the most attraction for those who are further removed from classroom realities – planning committees, educational authorities and so on' (Tudor, 2002, p. 5).

On the contrary, the ecological perspective puts teachers in a system which has its own contextual demands. This ecosystem 'has many "it depends"; therefore, it requires teachers to make appropriate choices informed by their best understanding of the context and the people in a specific setting. These choices may or may not match with the planning documents and the objectives set by the authorities (ibid). This system is more concerned with the actual realties, or 'what actually goes on from moment to moment in the language classroom' (Nunan, 1989, p. 9). There are no straightforward solutions and no action plans predetermined by random generalisations. It is a messy process. 'While the ecological perspective on language teaching does not offer neat, pre-packageable solutions, it does provide a number of relatively clear guidelines as to how pedagogical decision making should be approached' (Tudor, 2002, p. 8). Therefore, it is the concept of localness that is of prime importance in modifying the implications of the different methodologies which are dictated by the interaction patterns among different participants who are constantly influenced by the rules of their own little ecosystem (Tudor, 2002). It rejects the view of using generic learning and teaching principles as a tool of guidance for subject-specific contexts. The ecological outlook on ELT and complexity theory provides avenues for 'subject-specific theorizing, invites new questions and, most importantly, encourages sustained wondering' which can be seen 'as a feature of any research or indeed teaching activity' (Kubanyiova, 2016, p. 195).

Tudor (2002, p. 3) points to the importance of understanding teaching and stresses that the typical reductionist view would be ideal for pedagogical decision making if 'one classroom was essentially the same as another', and if learners and teachers were 'simply' learners and teachers. This is certainly not the case. It is not just the teachers and learners that are different in their approach and perceptions, but widely divergent teaching contexts prompt us to question whether this view is even relevant to a complex system where several sub-systems interact with each other in a range of different ways. 'Language teaching is far more complex than producing cars: we cannot therefore assume that the technology of language teaching will lead in a neat, deterministic manner to a predictable set of learning outcomes'. For effective results, '... it has to work with people as they are in the context in which they find themselves at a given point in time'. Each classroom is unique and responding to that uniqueness is a key factor when it comes to dealing with pedagogical matters as they arise in a classroom. From an ecological perspective, ' ... to understand what actually takes place in our classrooms, we have to look at these classrooms as entities in their own right and explore the meaning they have for those who are present within them in their own terms, and not with reference to a situation – external and supposedly universal set of assumptions'. However much we would like to, using the same materials, methods and procedure will not give us the same learning model and experience every time – of course, car manufacturing can be a different story (ibid, 2003, pp. 3-4).

> How can there be so many published articles, so many reports providing directions, so many professional development sessions advocating this or that method, so many parents and politicians inventing new and better answers, while classrooms are hardly different from 200 years ago...? Why [does] this bounty of research have such little impact?

> (Hattie, 2009 in Kubanyiova, 2016, p. 3).

Perhaps there is no simple and straightforward answer to these questions, but it was this concern that prompted educational researchers to investigate modes of transformation in their quest for alternative models of classroom observations (see O' Leary, 2014).

2.4. Teacher education and professional development

In the last few decades, there has been a shift of focus from teaching and learning processes to end-products, from enlightened knowledge to occupational skills and from evaluative practices to quantifiable results (Blackmore, 2000). In terms of how teaching should be improved, trainers come with a stagnant approach that encourages target- driven practice; whereas, 'shared professional knowledge is not stable but increasingly challenged and subject to continual transformations' (Fenwick, Jensen and Nerland, 2012, p. 1).To make the craft of teaching more efficacious, the systematic routes to train teachers and provide accountability have to be creative rather than reflexive. Teacher Education programmes need to enable teachers to deal with unplanned events in the classroom, and give them skills to implement new and challenging ideas which will create a 'lure for new possibilities that add to the interest of a situation and transform the way' things are 'addressed' (Stengers, 2008, p. 53)

Talking about 'creativity' in teaching and teacher training is quite fashionable. In his analysis of the professionalisation of creativity, Beighton draws our attention to CPD and initial teacher training programmes wherein creativity is often perceived as "interesting" or "new" within narrowly defined conditions which establish the parameters of professionalism around 'criterion-based, skills-focussed training'. This conception of creativity reduces professionalism to the performance of docility'. Drawing on Simmons and Thompson (2008), Beighton argues:

> This is particularly relevant to lifelong learning when human capital theories place the responsibility for creativity on the individual's investment in their own professional development (CPD) in lifelong learning, when it does this, the "skills sector" does not only promote creativity as coterminous with productivity and adaptability to economic circumstances and roles, but also aims to develop the "attitudes and skills" needed to prepare learners to "take their place as flexible and adaptable employees and consumers in Western capitalist societies". On this view, instead of providing flexibility, professionalism and change, it is simply another example of practitioners having to adapt and compromise

(Beighton, 2015, p. 29).

The following model is based on Michael Wallace's (1991) work and should help us understand

the transition between three eras of teacher education development in Britain.

| 'Craft' model
1800 – 1945

Novice teachers improve by observing the experienced and then perform in their supervision.

'to reproduce in the novice an already existing and established set of behaviours' (Gray and Block, 2012, p. 115) | 'applied science model'
Emerged in the post-war period – 1980s
New teachers gain knowledge about teaching and then are expected to use it in the classroom. They ought to be able to integrate the knowledge of philosophy, sociology, and psychology of education in their teaching planning and practice.

'to produce an educated teacher who had a solid grounding in social scientific theory' Gray and Block, 2012, p. 116) | Reflective model
Dominated literature in 90s – present
Practical teaching knowledge is central. Teachers must engage in critical inquiry by reflecting on their own practice.

'to produce reflective practitioners who would be capable of subjecting their post-course practice to constant scrutiny' (though ongoing use of journals, action research etc. (Gray and Block, 2012, p. 117) |

(Figure 2: Based on Gray and Block, 2012, pp. 215-217)

2.4.1.   Craft model and contemporary practices

The structure of the Craft model reflects an instrumental approach wherein teachers are given

readymade strategies and prescribed methods, but they seldom get the chance to challenge or

explore the depth of the reasoning behind those methodologies. Thus, the support from trainers and

mentors would entail 'what' needs to or should be done without sufficiently dealing with the 'why'

question. This is in conflict with Deleuzian philosophy as discussed in Beighton who points out that

'We learn nothing from those who say: "Do as I do". Our only teachers are those who tell us to "do

with me" and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than purpose gestures

for us to reproduce' (Beighton, 2015, p. 115). Based on this, Beighton argues that problem solving

approaches should be part of teacher education, whereby teacher educators and their trainees should

be learning together as well as from each other. However, in existing pedagogical practices, this is

given little value and importance. Problematising teacher education will create new avenues for discussion. As Beighton puts it:

> Lip service is paid to this principle in lifelong learning ... From a pedagogical perspective, this means working with education by problematising it, and refusing to reduce learning to the communication of pre-established ideas and judgements. In the existing teacher education mechanisms, lack of creativity represent[s] a significant threat to lifelong learning.

(Beighton, 2015, p. 157).

Creativity with the potential to accept 'chance' and 'error' should be at the core of teacher education. Instead of predetermined solutions, 'pedagogy of problems defined by the problem' should guide the contemporary restructurings of lifelong learning (ibid, p. 158).

Observations are common in approaches inspired by both craft and reflective models; however, instead of using them as a means of reproduction, the latter aims to use observations as an opportunity to reflect on individual practice.

2.5. Reflective practices, embodiment and materiality

Reflective practice is not uncommon in ESOL CPD sessions and post-observation meetings. Teachers are expected to re-evaluate their decisions against the commonly held beliefs that lie at the root of observation practice. Some of those decisions may have been taken to help learners in their hour of need – something observers, as outsiders, know very little about. Reflective practice is 'separating mind from body and thinking from doing in what is essentially a narrow mentalist view of learning; oversimplifying processes of both reflection and of practice' (Fenwick, Jensen & Nerland, 2012, p. 4). These sessions are planned to improve teachers' practice and evolve their pedagogical concepts. Teacher educators try to understand professional practice within identified boundaries where creative adaptations are little recognised. Although creativity is demanded and promoted, but central to its focus is how it functions in accordance with the marketisation agendas in further education.

This type of desired creativity demanded from teachers is rather selective, is expected to be in line with a particular political discourse and entails a concept of teaching and learning that is informed by economics (Beighton, 2015).

Kubanyiova's critical evaluation of this approach helps us understand the role of multiple sites within classroom practice and how an analysis of these complex relations 'from a more ecologically sensitive vantage point' paves the way for complexity to be used as a useful metaphor 'for understanding language teachers' cognitions' (Kubanyiova, 2016, p. 191). There are a number of authors in Applied Linguistics and second language acquisition literature who share this view (see Feryok, 2010 & Larsen Freeman, 2006).

There needs to be a detailed investigation of the extent to which the entire system of 'tools (documents), bodies, actions and objects' is examined (Fenwick, Jensen and Nerland, 2012, p. 7). Moving away from humanism and utilising materiality is likely to redefine the boundaries that at present are predominantly established around human actors and actions. Identifying the formation and the role of 'knowledge, knowers and known' together is suggested in sociomaterial approaches to professional learning - something that seems to have a small role in current observation assemblage (ibid., p. 7).

Cole (2006) has discussed many impediments to reflective practice such as anxiety and fear, which have become an integral part of teachers' professional lives. They have to meet deadlines, write reports, prepare students for exams, deal with behavioural and pastoral issues, show evidence of planning and progression, track individual progress, file differentiated feedback, devise schemes of work, chase attendance and lateness issues, sometimes liaise with social workers and carers and keep up with managerial updates. And to do all this, there is not enough support or resources for them to cope with this pressure. Often, there is a clash between the teacher's own perception of students' needs and teaching methods and what they are told to do by the management.

> External forces have also made teachers more fearful. Increasing pressures of
> accountability coupled with a general lack of public support (helped along
> considerably by a less than sympathetic media) have placed teachers and their work

under such public scrutiny that they work in a chronic state of fear, expecting
criticism of almost anything they do

(Cole, 2006, p. 15).

More importantly, engaging in the process of reflection becomes meaningless if it is not going to change anything. Cole (2006, p.19) argues that since teachers 'have little control over their work' and are 'expected to respond dutifully to mandated policy changes', the whole process makes them helpless. There is no rationale for focusing on the activity of reflection itself as it will not have any impact on their practice. When teachers are not encouraged to use their thinking to inform their practices, the continuous professional development process does not do what it says on the tin. In a nutshell, 'teachers are paid to do, not to think' (ibid., p. 19)

If we look at the reflective process from the specific perspective of the politics of body, Donald Schön's (1983) work on professionals' thought process, some believe, seems to be counterproductive. Experienced teachers do not think as much as new teachers while they are teaching because they have been through the experience many times before and they have 'a bodily recognition of the situation' (Erlandson, 2005, p. 663). The reflective approach sees active reflection as an answer to teachers' intellectual dilemmas and a solution to professional problems that require 'inquiry' into one's own practice. Foucault argues that this is an oversimplification as it reduces 'the matters of the political, social and cultural body... to matters of thinking' (Foucault 1991 in Erlandson 2005, p. 666). He defines discipline as a process of subjugating bodies. It is the use of, apparently invisible, force upon the body through 'calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviours... the human body' enters ' a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it' (Foucault 1977, pp. 137-139). In his view, discipline is used to increase efficiency 'in economic terms of utility' and 'obedience'; therefore, a teacher is going to produce 'knowledge within the discursive frames of the architect practice using the structures of the disciplinary mechanisms of the institutionalised practice' (Erlandson 2005, p. 666).

Going back to the point of discipline used as a tool to increase the force of the body, 'Surveillance thus becomes a decisive economic operator both as an internal part of the production machinery

and as a specific mechanism in the disciplinary power. The work of directing, superintending and adjusting becomes one of the functions of capital, from the moment that the labour under the control of capital, becomes cooperative' (Marx, Capital, vol. I, 313 in Foucault, 1977, p. 174-175). When a teacher attempts to improve their teaching abilities by engaging in reflection, they become 'a function of the production of institutionalised (discursive) bodies'. The teacher sees her body as an 'intellectually manageable object that is to make her knowing, more professional, more 'reflective', more efficient and therefore more beneficial (in economic terms) and at the same time more docile (in political terms)' (Erlandson 2005, p. 667). In other words, the teacher can only become more efficient and more knowledgeable if they engage in reflection while keeping their body within the thinking parameters of institutional habitus. A reflective practitioner can only establish themselves as a valuable professional if they accept the guidance of a set of rules or limits how something can or must happen or be done. '[T]he teachers are gradually disciplined to judge and normalise their everyday practice with tools not from their own practices but from those of their discursive captors' This could mean snatching at teachers' political power while empowering them to benefit the economy (Ibid., p. 668). These policy frameworks require teachers to inhibit a body that responds to the bureaucratic habitus obediently rather than representing themselves as knowledgeable practitioners who can think and act independently.

Reid and Mitchell (2015, p. 94) draw our attention to the absence of the body in teacher training programmes and discuss the theoretical and practical importance of it in the teacher education curriculum. The ability to 'more effectively 'be' the body' can be utilised for teaching and learning opportunities. More attention is paid to foregrounding of the mind and what goes on in the brain, yet bodily factors have received far less attention in teaching and learning professional development sessions. There are some unspoken rules about how a teacher's body must behave when they are judged against standards; an inappropriate teaching body will pertain to the realm of 'bad practice' and it is followed by immediate remedial action. For example, teachers are supposed to look attentive and make notes during peer observation and not gaze out of the window regardless of what their teaching habitus is dictating at the time. There has not been much discussion about the body doing teacherly things and how novice teachers can become successful teaching bodies. Also ignored is the length of time it takes for a teacher to become efficient in their practice and develop a 'feel for the

game' – there is no margin for the effortful and time-consuming process of becoming a better practitioner.

It will be useful to have a look at the support network and the level of access teachers have 'to regular and habit-forming opportunities to try on the feel of a "teacherly" body without being subject to the regulatory power of assessment'. Also, to analyse the opportunities to practice normal teaching behaviour 'mindfully and allow' them 'to gradually come to embody the group habitus of the teaching profession over repeated successful approximations in practice' (ibid., p. 102). It is important that teachers are given repeated opportunities and enough time to practise activities so that the bodily performances are improved; 'these bodily activities include … routinized mental and emotional activities which are – on a certain level – bodily, as well' (Reckwitz, 2002 in Green and Hopwood, 2015, p. 18)

3. Foucault and complexity theory: using transversal directions for analysis

Having reviewed the broad parameters of complexity in the previous chapter, in this section I focus more specifically on the relevance of this theory in relation to FE, as well as how the theory bears striking similitude to Foucault's work. I examine the features of complex systems to understand fundamental issues about the nature of teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) in Further Education and how it will be used as a basis for a research method premised on Foucauldian discourse analysis. I will use Foucault's work to develop an argument that justifies the use of complexity theory to consider the emergence of quality mechanisms characterised by business principles.

3.1. Complexity theory and FE

In the context of complexity debate, the internal constituent elements of a college can be described as different groups of people that include students, teachers, managers and administrators working in a building which also contains material things such as computers, photocopiers, printers, physical and virtual professional spaces, files, coursebooks, policy documents, teaching materials and curricula. At the macro level, external stakeholders such as parents, carers, policy makers, Ofsted inspectors and government policies are the components with interconnected interactions that lead to changes in an FE operation at various levels.

National and local TLA policy initiatives place different demands upon teachers and affect how they choose to carry out their everyday tasks. In complexity thinking, policies are not inanimate objects but live entities. For example, they will inform and change teaching practices by intervening through prescriptive guidelines coming from quality offices for practitioners working in the classroom. The suggested ways of doing things differently may or may not be in line with how these practitioners usually operate and how they want their work to be judged. Ofsted policies change on a triennial basis and the Education and Inspection Framework (EIF) effective from September 2019 marks a major shift away from the expectations in previous policies. Teachers are now expected to abandon

differentiated learning outcomes – something they spent years learning in their training courses and CPD sessions. They are also expected to justify the sequence of their schemes of learning in relation to employability and how it links to overall curriculum goals. The aims and objectives of individual lessons are no longer as important as overall curriculum objectives. This is likely to have changed what happens in the classroom as well as how managers and teachers plan their courses. Teachers' own objective knowledge of the curriculum has to be redefined through this strategic 'upgradation' of pedagogy pronounced by Ofsted in their latest document. This suggests that teaching and learning in the classroom cannot be assessed in isolation from the changing paradigms which underpin the quality assurance systems, from which policy makers derive their 'real' (legitimate) truth. These could be described as one of the several 'simultaneities' Mason notes from Brent Davis' work. By simultaneities they mean that it is 'phenomena that exist or operate at the same time ... tend to be understood as necessarily distinct, opposed, and unconnected' - in contemporary Western thinking. 'Such simultaneities tend to be seen as coincidental, but not co-implicated. Thinking in the perspective of complexity theory challenges these modes of interpretation' by offering 'useful insights into the projects of education and educational research' (Mason, 2008, p. 7).

Another relevant simultaneity is 'transphenomenality' which involves considering factors usually linked to other, seemingly different, phenomenal levels of explication. The shift to blended or online learning in the wake of the Covid-19 lockdown provides an excellent example of how complexity theory can offer insights that allow the consideration of apparently unconnected factors. For example, teachers wellbeing was generally associated with their performance in the classroom, but during the 2020-21 lockdown, many further issues were highlighted, in relation to student and teacher social class and how this impacts teaching and learning practices: digital fatigue, digital poverty, digital illiteracy and digital terror are some examples of the issues that have recently come to the fore vis-à-vis teaching and learning in FE. The impact of remote learning and teaching from home, using online platforms, may have changed teachers' directions or their working trajectories and adaptive orientations in this regard (ibid).

Foucault's focus on 'polymorphous' correlations is closely related to the key dimensions of complexity. He wants to understand the social processes through their history in order to unravel the 'play of dependencies'. He states:

'I would like to substitute this whole play of dependencies for the uniform simple notion

of assigning causality and by suspending the indefinitely extended privilege of the cause,

in order to render apparent the polymorphous cluster of correlations'

(Foucault, 1978, p. 13).

In the play of dependencies, Foucault's is concerned with mutual associations between ideas, objects and process in discursive formations. He then wants to explore connections between different types of discursive formations as well as the interrelationship of a particular discourse and the various social, economic and political factors. Foucault, in his differentiated analysis, uses these procedures to understand the concepts such as 'the mad', 'the sane' and 'the rational' in nineteenth-century psychopathology. He was interested in the process of discursive formations, their history and the rules which laid the foundation for those processes to take place. As Foucault (1978, p. 10) puts it:

I have studied, one after another, ensembles of discourse; I have characterised them; I have defined the play of rules, of transformations, of thresholds, of remanences. I have established and I have described their clusters of relations. Whenever I have deemed it necessary, I have allowed systems to proliferate.

In other words, he is not keen on studying what a discourse constitutes but wants to explore the process through which it came into being. It is the process, not the final product that gets his attention; it also is the essence of creativity. Exploring the conditions which enable transformation of rules, how particular discourses develop and how they are made to look rational are the key principles that define Foucauldian methodology. For Foucault, specifying and understanding the systematic and specific character of different discourses becomes possible by 'searching for the rules of formation for all of the concepts, methods, and theoretical postulates; examining the conditions of transformation which are effective, at a precise time, for the operations, concepts, and theories to be formed, or discarded, or modified; and ascertaining their specific existence in relation to other types of discourse' (Olssen, 2004, p. 462).

It is thus the crux of complexity theory that seems to mirror Foucault's conceptions of discourse and discursive formations. Olssen explains Foucault's refutation of a structuralist and Marxist view of history and how his ontology - informed by Nietzcheanism - resembles the fundamentals of

complexity theory. Foucault's approach suggests 'a radical ontology whereby the conception of the totality or whole is reconfigured as an always open, relatively borderless system of infinite interconnections, possibilities and developments' (Olssen, 2008, p. 24). It is this Nietzchean idea of multiplicities which negates platonic conception of hierarchies and highlights the compatibility of Foucault's ontology with complexity theory wherein totality is open, indeterminate and carries infinite possibilities of development as a result of interconnections between the constituent parts of a complex dynamic system.

Using Foucault's key philosophical concepts to understand quality and teaching practices in FE in the light of complexity theory can potentially offer a rounded view of pedagogical activities, which may not otherwise be possible with a fixed approach. In moving forward with this multi-faceted approach and treating quality improvement and curriculum delivery as sine qua non for FE operations, we can uncover complex connections and interactions between their emergent properties at multiple levels. For example, the success rates of any college at the end of an academic year may not tell us the efficacy of quality improvement or curriculum planning done at the beginning of the year. There may be a clash of priorities between curriculum leaders and quality managers; for instance, curriculum managers might hire a teacher who is not fully qualified because they do not have an option or time to wait for an applicant with the right qualification and experience. Consequently, their teaching may be highlighted as 'problematic' or inadequate through internally applied quality controls. A situation such as this may lead to a range of outcomes as both parties may respond to this in ways, producing new forms of hierarchical relations with a combination of resistance and compliance.

The interaction of those *emergent* properties will contain a mixture of top-down and bottom-up effects. A good example of top-down effects is the way in which Ofsted wants to see continuity in learner experience. In vocational contexts, Ofsted likes colleges to hire full-time teachers assigned to specific groups of students so there is consistency in the quality of input, marking and feedback; students seeing a number of teachers during their working week does not guarantee that (personal communication with Ofsted inspectors). However, this becomes an issue for curriculum managers if they have a significant number of teachers working only part-time in their teams. The Ofsted expectation affects actions of managers and teachers in terms of recruitment and how timetables are planned. The implication of hierarchically imposed specifications could be significant for learners

and teachers in terms of their workload and curriculum planning. Bottom-up effects might occur, for example, in relation to the interactions of the managers and teachers that may determine the working agendas at departmental levels. This dichotomy between timetabling constraints and continuity in student experience may result in emergent patterning and diversity of information flows leading to all sorts of self-transformations. Mason (2008, p. 10) draws on Lemke and Sabelli to argue that in 'complex socio-natural systems', interventions are always dependent on local linkages:

> Proposed changes at the classroom level, for example, have implications at school and district levels (for example, for teacher development, parental expectations, school resources, accountability, and so on) and need to be supported by related interventions across multiple levels… local linkages that actually interconnect actors, practices, and events across multiple levels of organisation; and away from single interventions and simplistic solutions to the recognition of the need for coordinated changes throughout the system and to its constraining and enabling contexts and resources.

In a similar vein, another practical example of polymorphous interconnections between colleges, external quality control mechanisms and broad underlying policy discourses can be seen in the 2019 EIF policy initiative that encourages teachers to use retrieval practice to enhance students' memory. Herein lies the problem of meeting awarding bodies' demands of 'covering' the whole curriculum within a certain period of time. By incorporating the principles of retrieval practice into curriculum planning, departments may or may not have enough time to 'cover' all content in funded contact hours. Classroom practices will have to be reactive and responsive in a number of unpredictable ways to meet with these conflicting demands. If a teacher wants to ensure that their learners fully internalise the course content, they may have to make choices about what students may not be able to learn in the classroom, and if they make a decision which is entirely exam-driven or focuses on students' completing the course work and their assignments, it could come at the expense of an ostensibly better teaching model. With so many 'ifs', like in chess games, there ought to be recurring patterns generated by discursive rules, the adaptive characteristics of agents and local conditions. Nonetheless, like other complex systems, this context too is open, dynamic, non-linear and open to change and infinity.

It is in these terms that we find complexity theory lurking in educational histories, and at the same time showing several close affinities with Foucault's archaeology. As Foucault states:

> though it is true that these discontinuous discursive series each have within certain limits, their regularity, it is undoubtedly no longer possible to establish links of mechanical causality, or of ideal necessity between the elements which constitute them. We must accept the introduction of *alea* (chance) as a category in the production of events [emphasis added]

> (1981a, p. 69)

The production of events therefore cannot be defined by uniformed regularity; it can only be understood in relation to historically constituted discursive norms. The main aim in this type of analysis is not to present any uncontested conclusions but to understand how practices develop and operate producing specific forms of subjectivities at particular times.

3.2. Archaeology and genealogy

Using archaeology as a method in the context of this research involves exploring historicity of teaching and learning in FE and describing discursive rules that are political in orientation. These rules define 'the real' and what may be considered false as well as expound the boundaries of compliance and resistance; what gets official sanction and what may be considered illegitimate. The focus of Foucault's archaeology is on discourse and practices informed by particular modes of thought – he calls them epistemes:

> The total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices... the episteme is not a form of knowledge ... or type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities.

> (1972, p. 191)

The analysis in this sense focuses on the essence of knowledge and its connections with language and life in general. 'In doing so it seeks to expose the "historical a priori" of the episteme as it manifests itself in the body of discourses under study… archaeology utilises theoretical knowledge (savoir) in order to analyse forms of knowledge'. In this sense, Foucauldian social analysis is concerned with the scrutiny of policy documents and the manner in which they describe truth based on the intended logic (Olssen *et al.*, 2004, p. 47).

Foucault's turn to genealogy marks a shift from the interpretation of epistemes in their historical context to an analysis of historical description of the nexus between knowledge, power and subjectivity. The concept of *emergence* – closely linked to complexity - goes into the heart of genealogical analysis. The purpose is to examine the emergence of new manifestations of knowledge and power and how their existence came into being. It is important to note that genealogy does not replace archaeology. In fact, archaeology is rather a prerequisite to genealogical inquiries (Koopman, 2008). In other words, it examines the *development and transformation* of theoretical knowledge (savoir) in relation to its *existence* by situating it in the context of power relations and history. This is part of Foucault's 'analytico-political philosophy' whereby 'everyday relations of power… traverse the social body'. Unlike Chomsky, he is not interested in 'deep structures' of linguistics which depict key ideas and opinions, but in describing the basic grammar of social and power relations. This grammar is open to interpretation in terms of its ecology and local needs rather than deterministic. Thus, Foucault (1994, pp. 541 -542) says:

> Relations of power, also, they are played; it is these games of power (jeux de pouvoir) that one must study in terms of tactics and strategy, in terms of order and of chance, in terms of stakes and objectives.

The strategic metaphor, here, is distinct from those of linguistics as it describes the process of relocating and reinterpreting the 'connections, encounters, blockages, plays of forces, strategies, etc. that at a given moment establish what consequently comes to count as being self-evident, universal and necessary' (Foucault, 1987, p. 104). In this methodological approach, Foucault rejects the notion of self-evidence outright.

In Chomskyan linguistics, a finite number of rules and constituents can be combined to generate an infinite number of sentences (Chomsky, 1965). Whilst Chomsky's mentalist perspective on language acquisition is concerned with 'intrinsic capabilities of mind', Foucault's main interest lies in explaining how infinite possibilities of application arise from a limited number of rules which constitute the social conditions of existence' (Olssen, 2008, p. 18).

3.3. Affinities between complexity and creativity

Foucault's description of historical events as unpredictable and unique links his definitions of archaeology and genealogy to complexity theory. A genealogist wants to explore a complex web of closely related practices wherein historical processes are open, irregular and indeterminant (Foucault, 1972).

> This fact that the future never simply reproduces the past, but adds always elements of novelty, means that the self is never simply the reproduced habitus of its socialisation, but due to its necessarily distinct location in time and space and culture, as well as its progressively growing capacity for agency, is characterised by elements of difference and uniqueness... it means that ethical values can never simply be expressed merely as repeatable rules of conduct
>
> (Olssen, 2008, p. 10)

This view is poles apart from laws of Newtonian physics as each historical instance is one of its type and the inherent aspects of change and uncertainty in those instances cannot be reductive in nature; therefore, the absence of universal rules makes the future unpredictable in an infinitely open universe. 'Complex systems, moreover, are contingent and dynamic, whereby the structure of the system is continuously transformed through the interaction of the elements and which are not explainable in reference to any external principle, origin, or foundation' (ibid, p. 12).

As mentioned earlier, complex systems are defined by their variations and 'self-organisation' as it is 'the capacity of complex systems which enables them to develop or change internal structure spontaneously and adaptively in order to cope with or manipulate the environment' (Cilliers, 1998, p. 90).

Foucault's conception of *change* is central to understanding the nature of self-organisation as described by complexity theory. For example, it would be useful to consider how colleges prepare for external visits at a particular time, what teachers do when they are being observed or how the quality of their planning documentation changes when it is sent for quality audits. Whilst it would be essential to examine these practices in their historical context, the answers to these questions will depend on a variety of factors and reflex reactions informed by localisation. It is, therefore, a system of quality assurance in education which is in disequilibrium. The lack of general principles and stability due to environmental constraints and disinhibitions in the classroom make them non-equilibrium systems too. This is precisely why observing any teaching and learning activity based on a fixed criterion could be problematic. The emergence of new patterns is inevitable as a result of countless probabilities of interactions and amalgamations of several local environmental strands that produce power effects. Minor changes in initial conditions - such as the type of learners present or absent in a particular classroom, the resignation of a senior manager in a particular college or the psychological effects of an unexpected announcement of an inspection on the social body – could cause vital changes in the whole system or in its components – changes that are non-reductive hence would have been impossible to predict. We have seen in Beighton's (2015) discussion of a baker's transformation how outcomes are almost impossible to predict without making generalisations about the present state of a piece of dough which changes from moment to moment.

Within this complex social structure, it is useful to trace the processes of such changes, to explore the connections between the present and the past as well as the ecological factors that made those changes possible in the first place. It is in this sense that historical events and social processes bring about creativity. As Foucault puts it (1972, p. 200):

> If I suspended all reference to the speaking subject, it was not to discover laws of construction or forms that could be applied in the same way by all speaking subjects, nor was it to give voice to the great universal discourse that is common to all men [*sic*] at a particular period. On the contrary, my aim was to show what the differences consisted of, how it was possible for men [*sic*], within the same discursive practice, to speak of different objects, to have contrary opinions . . . in short I want not to exclude the problem of the subject but to define positions and functions that the subject could occupy in the diversity of discourse.

The emergence of uniqueness and novelty in relation to the factors that control or affect what happens in a particular situation can be understood in The Archaeology of Knowledge (1984c, pp. 388-389). A thought is 'an original or specific response--often taking many forms, sometimes even contradictory in its different aspects--to these difficulties, which are defined for it by a situation or a context and which hold true as a possible question... to a single set of difficulties, several responses can be made . But what has to be understood is what makes them simultaneously possible: it is the point in which their simultaneity is rooted; it is the soil that can flourish them all in their diversity and sometimes in spite of their contradictions'.

The phenomenon of creativity is quite popular and widely used in educational settings, but how it is defined in this context is another matter. Beighton (2015, pp. 29-30) argues that creativity is often compounded with 'interesting' or 'new' by teachers and observers when actually what they mean is an instance of 'desirable' performance in relation to compliance. What this establishes is a 'truth' which aims to increase efficiency and flexibility by promoting the skills the market requires while at the same time it strengthening the mechanisms of quality control vis-à-vis performance management. Therefore, it becomes a purely 'technical activity, defined in terms of systems, categories and diagrams' (ibid). For example, in the compulsory education sector, teaching practices have always been expected to demonstrate an adaptation to managerial reason. At present, all practices have to operate within the boundaries of ideas explicitly stated in the 2019 EIF. Any deviation from the prescribed logic will be portrayed as flawed or unsound. This itself deters institutions and practitioners within those institutions from indulging in any creative undertaking. Although trying out different methods and doing things innovatively is encouraged, the validity of any divergent strategies is judged through the means of reasoning commonly accepted as self-evident. Teachers will have to plan and deliver lessons in particular ways that presuppose principles stipulated in, what Foucault calls, theoretical knowledge (savoir) in order to produce the desired outcomes. Beighton (2015) draws on Deleuze to highlight the chaotic and dynamic orientation of creativity as opposed to a product-driven conception. This approach sees creativity in the light of theories of praxis whereby the processes are relational rather than individualistic. In other words, their non-linear dynamics are informed by the type of interaction amongst its component parts and sudden transition between its different stages rather than being dependent on the characteristic of one part in isolation. He goes on to provide the example of reflective practice which is seen as an

integral part of teachers' professional development. The problem with the way reflection is used in this context is in its linearity and how it is practised in a formulaic fashion to meet 'pre-existing goals'. In other words, a teacher in their appraisal or post-observation meeting is expected to embody 'modes of thought' that underpin the discursive rules in quality manuals and other policy documents. This view ignores what Foucault describes as 'polymorphous cluster of correlations' and variations in the interaction between elements of sub-systems. Beighton goes on to state that a unique product is not necessarily creative since the focus of creativity is on process. As Beighton (2015, p. 34) states:

> Creativity is fundamentally processual, which is why it is a-productive. The genuinely new cannot be defined by its productivity and, indeed, only relates to activity insofar as it must imply a halt to the flow of ideas and activity which simply reproduce the given.

In other words, the activity is a developing phenomenon rather than a static structure; it is a continuously developing process rather than a fixed condition. Therefore, it is the act of producing rather than the produced that is central here. In order to understand a given activity, we must focus on what is being created and how it is created instead of focusing onreproducing and the end-result. The reason this is important in the context of quality assurance in education is because teaching practices need to be understood fully before they can be quality assured. If we keep focusing on results, we will keep reproducing both -teaching practices as well as practices of quality assurance – without being able to grasp how those practices have been brought about by different actors through different levels of engagement in different conditions. While improving quality is without doubt important for all stakeholders in FE, it would not be possible to do it if we only focussed on imitating what was done before in a reductive fashion in isolated situations.

This view supports a connectionist and holistic perspective on teaching practices which carries with it the effect of Foucault's discussion on 'emergence' as well as a variety of interpretive possibilities towards an ecological outlook on professional learning as suggested by complexity theory.

3.3.1. Transversality

What is common in Foucault's ontology, complexity theory and the notion of creativity, relate specifically to the conception of transversality. This idea facilitates an exploration of the issue of subjective consensus wherein, purportedly, the relations that evolve over time do not affect individuals. Beighton (2018, p. 2) suggests that 'such *a priori* explanations reduce complex experience to a repetitive set of drives, repressions and fantasies, defining the subject as an entity unaffected by changing relations in space and time' whereas 'transversal relations … aim to explain how is it possible for things to exist in a flow of time which changes them and thus refer to a wider understanding of the interconnections which embody social change. In other words, there is a shift from a viewpoint which puts subjects and entities into static categories to a transient nature of the world whereby exploration of various transformations becomes the principal means of uncovering the specificity of situations. It gives way to new explanations by examining different variables, avoiding simplistic solutions, focusing on different aspects of process over time and by paying particular attention to interactions within the network. (ibid.).

There is an important sense of the inherent character of thought which theorises our understanding of things and our relations with them in terms of their existence. In this sense, 'our relations with the world are … not hierarchical, linear or even, properly speaking, subjective: they are instead transversal' (Beighton, 2018, p. 4). In this, the extent to which the phenomenon of *change* is central to the debate as it bears close resemblance to Foucault's conception of transformations whereby any ecological change is unpredictable rather than based on presupposed hierarchical structures. The nature of transformations and how things develop will depend on the nature and type of interactions and also on their results. As Beighton (2018, p. 5) puts it: 'transversality, then, is inseparable from the potential for change which exists when affects collide, creating sense, constructing spaces of possibility and forming bridges between new ways of being'. The interaction takes place amongst entities and actors that sit side by side and the effects of their actions are often determined by chance, so political and social hierarchies are subject to change, hence unpredictable.

Therefore, the whole apparatus of power in complex and transversal systems is interdependent and multi-dimensional. For example, even in male-dominated societies, a middle-class woman could be more powerful than most working-class men in many situations. In that it is crucially important to

understand the material conditions within which interactions take place and evaluate critically the institutional discourse which is defended (Olssen, 2004). Skott- Myhre *at el.* (2018, p. 104) cite Foucault's analysis of workings of sovereign, disciplinary and biopower adding that:

> None of these techniques of power function equally or in uniform ways. Instead, they exist together within social institutions encompassing one another and rupturing along their fault line. In this sense, they are constantly dispersing and then re-accumulating around events of sudden expressions of desiring production.

An example of this in a Further Education college could be found in teachers' expressions of dissent which may take different forms in a range of different settings. For example, in team meetings expressing opinions at variance with those held by line managers or senior leadership, not fully engaging in continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives, using strategies that are slightly different from those officially recommended for classroom practice, showing reluctance to carry out informal collaborative tasks which may have an impact on curriculum improvement plans or in their criticism of the college policies or leadership in their one-to-one conversation with an Ofsted inspector during a formal external inspection. In situations such as these, the power apparatus could sway back and forth or from side to side.

The conclusion that this points to is that teachers are not always oppressed or merely 'passive recipients' of the policies imposed on them as 'there is no simple cause-effect relationship to be identified, and a certain vocabulary associated with transversality is needed to describe the relations it maintains'. The transversal transformations achieved through various interconnections can only be understood by the unfolding of a series of events which form' hierarchical structures in FE (Beighton, 2018, p. 7). Behind those 'series of events' there are also different support mechanisms and genealogical strands of curriculum, quality and teaching expressed through non-linear interactions between socio-material artefacts and human agents. Therefore, the transversal connections in effects of power, emerging from conflicts and agreements, could not be understood separately by taking the predefined subject positions for granted. The emergence of new subjectivities, relations and new effects of power can be uncovered by using the conceptions of transversality as a tool for investigation.

3.4. What Foucault offers

Foucault's archaeology and genealogy will form the basis for the description and explanation of policies and practices in FE, with a clear focus on dynamic, non-linear and historical interactions between actors and other multiple variables at different levels. Such analysis will have to consider a multitude of factors and offer insights for understanding the epistemology of the sector by taking an interpretive approach. It is worth mentioning the challenges raised by Foucault's discussion of certain concepts that can – at times - be a little too opaque to the reader. Therefore, keeping the normative nature of the English education sector in mind, engaging Foucault in educational research and integrating his ideas into practices can be cumbersome, making a range of associated features and interconnections far from well understood. The phenomena closely associated with the salient features of Foucauldian discourse analysis is the description of open dynamical systems offered by the principles of contemporary complexity theory and how the notions of 'creativity' and 'transversality' are understood in educational research (See Beighton, 2015; 2018). It is precisely for this reason that Foucault has been described as a complexity theorist (see Olssen, 2008; Mason, 2008); therefore, using his analytical perspectives allows the generation of questions that seek to understand the interrelation between component parts of a system which is defined by indeterminacy and incompleteness.

Closely related to Foucauldian discourse analysis are the workings of the dynamic systems explicated in complexity theory. In relation to the focus of this research, the rationale for using Foucault's thinking tools, such as genealogy and archaeology, along with the principles of complexity theory thus is relatively straightforward. Teaching and learning, managed as they are in an FE college that is influenced by external stakeholders makes it a complex system. In order to rediscover the contemporary structural conditions of Further Education and develop an emergentist understanding of its quality improvement agendas, it is important to unravel the effects of power in professional practices which are inextricably intertwined with the dominant political discourse. The idea of 'new' entailed in the current educational discourse derives directly from the notion of compliance in neoliberalism which is frequently confused with creativity (Beighton, 2018). In the context of creativity, if increased compliance represents improved quality in education, we could see the semantic properties of 'creativity', which may still be in situ in other contexts, being stripped from it in FE. The concept of microprocesses of sub-systems in complexity theory embedded in the

multiplicity of power relations presented in Foucault's ontology - with its focus on historical analysis - pave the way for a more detailed exploration of how creativity is perceived and presented in FE. An implementation of transversal thinking is fundamental to the emergence of a different kind of analysis that is concerned with genuine creation rather than reproduction and demands a different focus to explore incidental changes and interconnections between agents and entities. An understanding of the way in which FE currently operates through a Foucauldian and transversal lens will then allow an alternative interpretation of the connections between policies and classroom practices in Further Education – which, of course, is the main purpose of this research.

CHAPTER 4

4. Research design

4.1. The rationale

In their most general sense, observation and assessment practices in FE are based on the OBE (outcomes-Based Education) model. This model uses frameworks and concepts that require practitioners to plan, present and deliver in a sequential and measurable fashion in order to achieve specific goals in a specified length of time. Student learning, it is believed, ought to be visible against predefined learning aims and objectives. The operational principles of quality assurance and improvement schemes consist of criteria for assessing documentation and teaching practices that are organised around predetermined and clearly defined outcomes, which are written in a particular way, and assessment methods that make it possible to check whether the outcomes have been achieved.

Beighton, in his analysis of the use of ILPs (Individual Learning Plans) in ESOL, describes the practice of SMART targets for learners as a 'distancing (linguistic) procedure' in the sense that they are written with the express purpose of meeting institutions' needs as opposed to learners'; therefore, their linguistic accessibility and meaningfulness to ESOL learners can be debatable (2012, p. 28).
As Tudor points out: '... language teaching is a complex activity' and this may be obvious to many practicing language teachers. However, 'the same cannot be said about...other actors who, in one way or another, play a role in the endeavour of language education – political and educational authorities, the management or administration of teaching institutions... and many others'; it is these actors who do not seem to be fully aware of the complex realities of teaching and learning. 'Nevertheless, it is often within frameworks set up by these actors that teachers have to live out their tasks in the classroom' (Tudor: 2002, p. 2)

For example, within these frameworks, one way to ensure compliance with standards is to examine the linearity of staging in schemes of work, and how well a teacher can move from one topic to another in an orderly fashion. Successful implementation of methods like PPP (presentation, production, practice) and TTT (test, teach, test) is perhaps a key factor in receiving an 'outstanding' grade. The decisions around sequencing curriculum components in a particular order are informed

by the criteria which are prescribed by awarding bodies. Practitioners have to confine their practices to the discursive limitations of the necessary; therefore, they are unlikely to express intentions to use new ideas and methods. Pink (2012) has discussed an interdisciplinary approach with specific reference to kitchens, where 'tradition and innovation matter equally'. If we draw an analogy between 'teaching' and 'washing up', this approach will help us see 'how conventions are followed' when participants engage 'in an identifiable practice'. This approach 'simultaneously reveals the details of how innovation is produced through the performance of practice, as well as the ways in which this is contingent on the wider environment' (ibid 2012, p. 50). On the contrary, in the current inspection paradigm, there is limited space for any creativity and innovation. A one-size-fits-all approach to education assumes that delivering 'input' based on traditional configurations will yield expected results. It is all very deterministic and predictable.

The role and purpose of quality assurance schemes in ESOL is summed up by Beighton (2012, p. 27) who notes that these schemes are:

> … imposed not through direct coercion, but rather through recently-internalised gaze of technologies of power. It is this gaze which forms the basis of "lesson observations" and their attendant "reports", "reflective logs", "Quality Improvement Plans" and so on. They are enacted through complex self-policing apparatuses such as "appraisals", "subject learning coaches", "advanced practitioners", "Continuing Professional Development (CPD) declarations", "action research cycles" and so on which are able to operate at the heart of working teams as an internal monitoring process. On this analysis, their role is little to do with quality, and much to do with making sure that the blunter, external gaze of instruments such as inspection and policy passes along the capillaries to their destination.

It is the people, networks and management mechanisms that carry this operation that are described as capillaries.

> The success of this coercive model depends almost exclusively on the success of its capillaries and the shift from an external to an internalised gaze across spaces

rendered maximally "transparent". When the focus of power shifts from "quality"

... the capillaries will remain to transmit the new expression of control

(Ibid, p. 27).

In other words, the contemporary discourse of 'quality', manifested in various observation practices, may change but will be replaced by the deployment of another discourse via 'technologies of power' and 'technologies of self'. Capillaries do not come from a central place, and they do not start at a particular point in a social body. They circulate in every part, the whole time and even get to the furthest apparently unimportant points. The success of modern power lies in its ability to operate at the capillary level. Therefore, capillaries proliferate a particular discourse in all directions and in this case, it is the discourse of quality that is the central focus. Modern power does not oppress; it produces desires and needs to comply with its contemporary expression of control. As a result, individual and social bodies carry out a range of operations on their conduct to achieve the required correctness described as technologies of self. Technologies, used as tools to manage bodies, permit and lead to categorization. Based on this, it appears that the quality assurance practices are used to classify individuals and their practices and therefore cannot be deemed neutral.

Along with this political dimension in which quality apparatuses are used as a tool of surveillance and classification, this system is also based on the assumption that teaching practices are homogeneous. This view ignores a complex array of components which cannot be reduced to rules and processes that facilitate a system designed to control subjects. Teaching, learning and assessment practices do not exist in isolation. They are affected by a number of social, material and symbolic factors and variables. Observation of teaching practices can be seen as a site whereby a range of issues - such as monitoring, control, management of teaching quality and the relationship between public values (pronounced by the state) and professional autonomy - intersect. There is no predictable trajectory in this process and may happen at random, or as a result of an interaction among elements of a nested echo system (Kubanyiova, 2016). Teaching and learning can be seen as a complex and dynamic system and using a chunk of it to draw half-baked conclusions may not be a desirable exercise. '...we must be careful not to make assumptions about the whole system based

on our examination of one small part' (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008 in Kubanyiova, 2016, p. 192).

Like other social practices, teaching and learning is about making connections. At times, these connections may involve taking risks in terms of setting divergent learning objectives based on the demands of the immediate context. This cannot be generalised and may not be limited in the way it is interpreted. The reasons and causes of a same action, taken in a different context, can be different therefore similar events cannot be 'reduced to general issues'. Using prescriptive guidelines to assess teaching that is informed by contextual factors is problematic in many ways. It appears, like other professional spheres, 'the so-called scientific ethos' has found its way into education too. If certain things have not been included in any of the recommendations that inform observation policies, they are not given careful consideration. A statement like 'this is not good teaching' in feedback sessions, resonates with what Stengers calls 'the typical arrogance and blindness of the "this is not scientific" claim'. 'We meet... scientific experts' who 'judge a concrete situation as if their criteria and demands were generally applicable norms' (2008, p. 47). This approach is even more toxic in psychosocial areas where there are a number of things that have nothing significantly general about them. For example, how Ofsted form their judgements is based on the guidelines in their inspection framework for all schools and colleges. This approach is likely to be founded upon mistaken generic assumptions about the specific nature of practices at a specific time in a specific context with a specific but unique background.

This is the point. Any policy or practice cannot be universally acknowledged as good or bad. The relationship between 'outstanding' teaching, as described in quality assurance policies, and actual teaching practices is likely to be complex and nonlinear with invariable effects on teachers as 'the impact of any one set of variables upon any other is disproportionate... depending on local and temporary conditions' (Radford, 2008, p. 152). A research method in education therefore requires a different set of exploratory agenda based on local and immediate needs where it is not just 'human only' factors that inform and modify teaching practices but other historical and material issues that influence everyday practice such as professional development opportunities, buildings, salaries, remits, documentation and non-teaching tasks. It is the interaction of various components with

other agents in the environment that matters, rather than how individual components behave in the system.

There needs to be an investigative method that accommodates the inherent randomness of a dynamic, unpredictable, complex and messy process of teaching and learning and the ways in which it is linked to quality improvement policies in a particular context at a certain period of time. In order to explore connections and analyse actions taken to negotiate power relations, nowhere can this circumstance of plurality of interactions between humans and non-human entities be more evident than in an ecological framework such as an approach based on Foucauldian discourse analysis.

4.2. Analytic framework

In order to highlight the relevance of my decision of using a Foucauldian approach to the analysis of teaching practices and the politics of quality assurance in FE, I want to briefly discuss some key concepts offered in Bourdieu's sociological approach and elaborate on my reasons for considering and comparing them with Foucault's ways of thinking in this study. Essentially this brief contrast of these two thinkers' ideas allows us to recognise the significance of Foucauldian discourse analysis with a range of governmental forms at multiple levels which lead to the emergence of new events and novel modes of power.

4.3. Bourdieusian theoretical concepts

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was one of the key theorists of social practices - more specifically observation practices. One of the main sociological concerns in Bourdieu's work was to understand power relations and the logic of everyday practices. Some of the key concepts discussed by Bourdieu are habitus, field and capital.

Habitus is 'the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them' (Wacquant, 2005, p. 316, in Navarro, 2006, p. 16). It refers to the way particular life experiences of an agent lead to the development of particular dispositions which then help them deal with various social situations without conscious deliberation. Field refers to a range of various avenues of practice with its distinct positions and struggles for positions. Each field has its own rules

which are mostly in line with the field of power. Fields are structured spaces such as institutions, field of law, religion or groups. Capital can be cultural, social and symbolic. Cultural capital refers to cultural resources and awareness. Bourdieu used it to discuss inequalities in the French education system. It determines the cultural identification of agents in different social groups. Symbolic capital refers to prestige. Social capital involves network-based resources, in terms of relationships, at an individual's disposal and their capacity to mobilise them. (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119)

Going back to my research question, in the context of quality assurance policies and procedures in FE and how they are linked with teaching practices, a question may be asked that this research does not takes into account some of these Bourdieusian concepts to understand the dynamics of FE organisational structures and the hierarchical arena. Therefore, the next section is concerned with my decision to use Michel Foucault's ideas and to lay out how they provide a useful base for exploring the ways the assemblage of quality assurance and improvement is linked to everyday teaching practices and how it might enable a detailed analysis of the effects of observation schemes on teachers.

4.4. Why Foucault? A contrast with Bourdieu

Michel Foucault's conceptual frames are going to be used as the basic skeleton of the analysis. Although both Boudieu and Foucault have discussed the contemporary capitalistic logic and how social spaces have been commodified by it, Foucault's interest in the politics of truth and different effects of power relations allows us to disentangle all aspects of neoliberal rationality rather than focussing only on the negative sides of capitalism. It is Foucault's conception of power, which goes beyond economics and examines complex manifestations of the effects of power, that I find quite fascinating.

Despite the worthiness of Bourdieusian perspectives to understand social structures and to recognise various schemes that assign people different positions in the social world, there is a generalisation that habitus shapes peoples' collective behaviors or, at times, that their lived experience may dictate their practices. In the context of this study, it is important to explore the social positions of different actors – such as teachers, managers, inspectors–for two reasons. Firstly, an experienced teacher may be more knowledgeable about teaching and learning practices than a manager or an inspector who

forms a judgement about how well the teacher was performing. Therefore, teachers may have more *influence* on classroom practices but lack *powerful knowledge* of regulatory and strategic operations; and secondly, the ideology of quality assurance creates the discourse that defines 'good practice', so it is vital to consider the power relations and how teachers' practices embody that powerful discourse.

However, using a school of thought that implies that people who occupy similar positions in the objective structure of fields are likely to think and act in a similar fashion, to reason a theoretical premise of this research design, can be a bit too simplistic, hence problematic. It is not going to offer a wide range of investigative tools which can be used to examine multifaceted historic, contemporary and complex social networks and issues in the sector. Moreover, I find this approach a little radical and polarised; either I am an oppressed teacher who acts under severe constraint or I am an oppressor who works in senior management. In terms of examining connections between observation schemes and teaching practices and the range of issues linked to the research question in this study, Foucauldianism offers a wider perspective of the way in which we can explicate different versions of the meanings of a range of teaching and quality improvement discourses in the sector as well as their political origins and consequences.

The process of teaching and learning, and how it is assessed, comprises of change, unpredictability and variability. People who are involved in this process occupy complex objective positions in the field and have dynamic networks of relations amongst themselves and non-humans such as material-semiotic artefacts. The approaches underpinning the theoretical concepts based on linear and fixed models of reasoning tend to look at parts in isolation and construct static categories, by taking an atomistic view to assume that meaningful actions are shaped by the intentionality of actors as a result of the internalisation of the social structures around them. Therefore, it becomes increasingly apparent that an approach that is purely structural, and has little space for change, cannot draw on the fluid and indeterminate nature of the social context of teachers' practice and fails to reflect a range of shifting political paradigms influencing the field (Gherardi, 2010). There is an assumption that every state of affairs is stable and, through a rational investigation, can be explained objectively within a range of certain classifications used to describe and understand the notion of 'truth'. In order to defend my decision to not use an approach like this, I would argue that

social reality is inherently complex, and teaching experiences and assessment concepts are no exception. This begs the question: what would be the purpose of using a deterministic theory to explore the phenomena of teaching practices which are non-linear, unstable and diverse in nature in the first place?

'The concept of practice resides in the fact that practices rest in other practices; that is, they are interconnected, and their interconnection makes it possible to shift the analysis from a practice to a field of practices which contains it'. For example, it may involve shifting the analysis from classroom teaching to the whole education sector (Gherardi, 2012, p. 155). This takes us deeper into the logic behind different actions taken in the field of FE. I might be able to establish very clearly how some actions relate to the policies that further shape and entrench beliefs about the stakes that are at stake in the field – or issues related to one's own political survival that concern everyone. To understand a social context that is immensely complicated, it is important to explore prevalent beliefs and taken for granted assumptions by identifying the decisions practitioners take based on their 'common sense'.

The Bourdieusian notion of 'doxa' directs our attention to matters of belief and norms in a typology of certain arenas of power. Doxa occurs when the limits that trigger the inequalities in a social world are forgotten. It is 'an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident' (Bourdieu 1984, p. 471). In the context of this study, this could be applied to observation practices which may create an illusion of improvement, transformation and emancipation, but in fact they could potentially turn out to be politically repressive since they are designed to regulate teaching practices in a constrained manner.

Nonetheless, the idea of 'power' is more interesting in Foucault's work which describes the effects of power dependency on how variable conundrums construct different situations and how they are related to people. Power is exercised by influencing the conduct of subjects rather than by exerting force. Foucault, in his two lectures in 1979, shed light on the difference between 'force' and 'power':

> A man who is chained up and beaten is subject to force being exerted over him, not
> power. But if he can be induced to speak, when his ultimate resource could have

been to hold his tongue, preferring death, then he has been subjected to power. He has been submitted to government. If an individual can remain free, however little his freedom may be, power can subject him to government. There is no power without refusal or revolt.

(Foucault 2001, p. 324).

In 1982, he explained his idea of power more clearly as 'a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon action, on possible or actual future or present actions' (Foucault, 2000a, p. 340). This notion of governmentality makes Foucault's conception of power different to other predominant views based around top-down approaches.

A Foucauldian approach that, at times, might see power as productive rather than repressive will be a good guideline that could provide insights into the purposes and patterns in practising teachers' behaviours.

'We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production'

(Foucault 1991, p. 194).

For FE teachers, power exercised through observation practices may well produce a strong desire amongst teachers to conform to the norms of quality assurance agendas. For example, when a teacher self-disciplines themselves according to a particular teaching method even in an observer's absence, their practice is an embodiment of the ideals of 'high quality teaching' as defined by their senior management and regulators. This could be a gratifying experience which could give the teacher a sense of empowerment and it may also be seen a step towards a privileged world of 'good

practice' embodied in 'outstanding' practitioners' teaching. So, instead of using any apparent force, power may operate through creating desires and by making people in charge of their own improvement. One function of power described by Foucault is that it produces the kind of bodies that the system requires (Pylypa, 1998).

It is crucial to note that this Foucauldian notion of power is based on an understanding of the specific paradigms of social ecology by 'showing the actual working of power as opposed to the Marxist idea of 'assuming it on the basis of uneven structural relations' (Holifield, 2009 in Muller, 2015, p. 33). For example, as mentioned in the literature review, contemporary governmentality does not require the use of force and violence; individuals can be made to behave in certain ways through free will. It is this 'biopower' that helps people self-regulate their own conduct and discipline themselves. Whilst the state uses surveillance, monitoring and assessment methods to impose boundaries and enforce discipline, it tries to get a general consensus of opinion on how good, normal or acceptable should be defined (Foucault, 1991c). More than just analysing practices in a particular context, I find an insightful political side of Foucauldian discourse particularly fascinating: it focuses on exploring what Gherardi describes as, 'texture of practices' which opens up avenues for discussion about the dynamics of power in alternative scenarios. Whilst discussing the conception of texture of practices, Gheradi explains 'how connection-in- action comes about, how associations are established, maintained and changed among the elements of a partially given form' (Gherardi, 2012, p. 158).

This transformed operation of power, which is linked to the ownership of powerful knowledge, is bound to meet novel modes of resistance. For instance, apart from looking at how different observation policies manifest themselves in teaching practices, my main concern will also be to locate practices that resist those polices and understand their way of operating in FE.

In addition, as a result of that resistance, a Foucauldian analysis seeks to explain how power changes tactics to re-establish and reinforce its authority. And more importantly, if resistance (in this case from teachers) is another form of concealed power, as Foucault asserts, then how does it contribute to creating conditions in which observation practice and self-regulation become possible? An analytic frame informed by this perspective does not deny the reader the security of knowing the

possibility of alternative forms of power that might be dispersed throughout an FE institution, 'inherent in social relationships, embedded in a network of practices' and 'operating on all of the "micro-levels" of everyday life' rather than merely looking at power mechanisms 'possessed', and imposed by senior managers and policy makers (Pylypa, 1998, p. 21). The effects of power 'cannot be reduced to singular meanings. But they can be unsettled – shaken up, breached, distributed, torn – so that new questions and meaning are generated' (MacLure, 2003, p. 81).

Unlike the traditional Marxist dichotomy between ideology and knowledge, Foucault argues that knowledge is produced by power relations. His analysis of power relations is purely non-economic. Power is not a commodity, and something possessed by a person, but is exercised via a range of techniques, discourses and dispositions. To Foucault, discourses are not just texts; they include material social practices. Like in many other countries, education policies in neoliberal Britain are pronounced by the state, so the official discourse of educational policies dictates the content and purpose of curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment practices. These 'are obvious instances in which discourse becomes the instrument and object of power. But discourses operate at a number of levels within educational institutions. Teachers, for example, have their own craft discourse relating to pedagogical practices. This discourse will impose limits upon what is possible in areas of classroom organisation control and discipline, or the assessment of learning'. Foucault believes that educational systems are used to distribute, stratify and appropriate discourses (Olssen *et al.*, 2004, p. 67).

> But we know very well that, in its distribution, in what it permits and what it prevents, it follows the lines laid down by social differences, conflicts and struggles. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining and modifying the appropriation of discourses, with the knowledge and power they bring with them.
>
> (Foucault, 1972, p. 46).

An example of how certain discourses are used as instruments of power could be the discourse of 'assessment for learning' and how in recent years it has been used to evidence the achievement of learning outcomes in a particular lesson. The language of assessment in relation to individualisation

has dominated the discourse of teachers and it informs their daily practice. A Foucauldian analysis will allow the examination of such discourses and how they are linked with theories that shape education policies, 'revealing the effects of using this form of ... language to legitimate the exercise of power' (Olssen *et al.*, 2004, p. 67).

Keeping the focus of this research in mind and how it is concerned with exposing connections between policies and how teachers describe their practices, it is crucial to remember that Foucauldian discourse analysis is not limited to linguistic text analysis – it goes beyond that. Discourses per se are not merely written or spoken texts. Discourse is a concept linked with discursive social practices anchored in political conditions. It is important to look at what is written and what is said, but it is even more important to look at the political factors that shape texts and actions (ibid). What informs the process of production in given situational conditions, within a particular field of knowledge, must be explored in detail. Discourse 'as a piece of discursive practice ... focuses upon processes of text production, distribution and consumption. All of these processes are social and require reference to the particular economic, political and institutional settings within which discourse is generated' (Fairclough, 1992, p. 73).

In the following section, I explain how the concept of discursive practices in Foucauldian discourse analysis can create the possibility of exploring different avenues in the search for alternative explanations and readings of FE policies and contemporary teaching practices.

4.5. Discursive practices

The notion of "discursive practices" is the brainchild of Foucault. The term refers to discourses and practices of discourses – not in the linguistic sense but rather these are practices that are linked to knowledge. However, the focus is not exactly on knowledge itself: knowledge vis-à-vis information or understanding of a subject. It is a concept that questions the status of knowledge. What is questioned is the way in which knowledge came into being, how 'the real' became 'the real', how 'truth' was granted its status; more importantly, what are the aspects of the political dimensions of 'the reality'. Knowledge comes about as a result of practices that contain several different elements and whereby several heterogeneous entities work together without a predictable organising

principle; therefore, the discursive framework provides tools to describe the connection between the social and the material.

Bacchi and Bonham (2014, p. 174) state that Foucault's main analytic focus was discursive practices – a theoretical framework whose ultimate aim is to show

> how knowledge is formed in the interaction of plural and contingent practices within different sites, each of which involves the material and the symbolic. The term "discursive practice/s" describes those practices of knowledge formation by focusing on how specific knowledges ("discourses") operate and the work they do. Hence discursive practices are the practices of discourse – which is why they are called *discursive* practices – rather than language in use or how people "practice discourse" [emphasis in original].

In other words, it is not about how people use different mediums of communication such as speaking and writing to convey meaning, but how different established scientific, economic, political, psychiatric, educational and technical spheres function and determine their operation at different times. The analysis of these practices should help us understand the process of knowledge formation and may also help us answer questions about political implications of a particular 'truth' in a specific discourse. The task of discursive practices as an analytical framework is something which attracts attention to a variety of complex conditions and things, happening at a particular time and place, taking part in the construction of 'the truth'.

So, what is the discourse of quality improvement in FE and what ideological currents infuse its functional structures? More importantly, how does it manifest itself in teachers' daily practices? To answer these questions, I will be looking at key policy discourses produced and distributed with the aim of improving teaching, learning and assessment standards. In this process, the methodological focus seeks to trace the breadth of historical formation of the knowledges (discourses) that inform the standards used to measure teacher performance in observations, and the ways in which they may be concerned with measuring observable behaviour and documentation in their entirety. That is to say, the study will explore the process of quality improvement agendas, what these agendas

are, how they came about, what they are meant to do, what they actually do and the background and social positions of people responsible for devising these programmes of action. It will then be useful to examine the connection of these policy texts with the ways wherein they influence and affect the operation of everyday ESOL teaching practices. In other words, in an attempt to understand the lineage of observation schemes and agendas, the social origins of contemporary dominant discourses of quality improvement and their development over the course of time will be explored. The aim is to investigate dominant assertions by questioning what is taken for granted and challenging assumptions. It is this deconstruction of commonly accepted 'knowledge' – as well as the deconstruction of the factors that contribute to knowledge formation over time– that Foucault calls genealogy.

While the language that underpins quality improvement and quality assurance agendas in relation to ESOL teaching practices is important, Foucauldianism is primarily concerned with the material nature of language and the way it is used to exercise power rather than looking at the syntactic structure and the semantics of it (Olssen et al, 2004). The conclusion would be that Foucault's use of the term 'discourse' is not directly connected with language or how people use it as discussed previously in contrast to Chomskyan linguistics. Whilst interpreting a complex theoretical phenomenon as such as this, I have got to be circumspect; we could see that 'Foucault's concept of discursive practices…combines materiality and language in a single configuration' (Mol in Bacchi and Bonham, 2014, p. 176). Bacchi and Bonham find theoretical positions that assert that there is a reality out there which can be understood as problematic. Drawing on Mol's term of 'ontological politics', they suggest that there are a number of specific realities that coordinate with each other, so this makes it difficult to answer the question: What is 'reality'? Rather, there are diverse actions, diverse situations in diverse circumstances in which these realities function and establish themselves without any generic equilibrium. But behind this coordination, the role of politics is crucial. To approach the theme of politics by an analysis of 'What is the real?' is therefore to draw attention to Foucault's claim – 'that politics is always involved in the production of "the real"' (ibid, p. 177).

It is often assumed in FE that the power to make strategic decisions was never placed in the hands of teaching staff. FE teachers are often told about 'the reality' by senior management who still reserve the right to devise action plans based on government policies. Teachers, however, are encouraged

to share good practice with peers. That is how it appears – but if this assumption is true, is this the only manifestation of 'the real' in FE? Who defines what good practice entails? Is it teachers or the leadership teams in FE colleges, Ofsted and organisations such as the AOC (Association of Colleges) who create the discourse that defines which practices are good and how they can be made observable? It goes without saying that these leaders in the sector have an intimate knowledge of finances, human resources and proactive business-driven quality assurance procedures. Foucault discusses how the medical profession obtained power via privileged scientific knowledge and reached a stage where it defined reality by prescribing the limits of normality and deviance (Pylypa, 1998). It may not be a like-for-like comparison but in the same way that childbirth has become a monitored and controlled procedure, it looks as though a kind of quasi-market approach to teaching and learning based on outcomes and evidence has done the same to education. Policy makers use authoritative knowledge to describe the boundaries of acceptable and deviant behaviour then determine a course of action for making normal behaviour visible for supervision.

The question is whether it is teachers' bodily and experiential knowledge, or the policies proposed to regulate teaching practices that define the norms of good practice. What happens when there is no conformity? And how is compliance ensured by using the language of risk evidenced in reports about lower recruitment and poor student achievement and therefore may result in redundancies? FE teaching and learning policies are also called 'learner experience' policies. Do these documents always use the language of risk? If so, to what extent is it spelled out in improvement plans? Some policies may elaborate on how teachers can be better supported and how learner experience can be improved. If that is the case, why have observation schemes been so unpopular amongst teachers (see O'Leary, 2014). This raises many questions about the purpose of quality schemes such as observations and whether they are linked to 'improvement' or connected with surveillance and control.

Beighton (2012, p. 21) discusses the use of initial assessments and ILP in ESOL and how these practices are used to 'construct identities' that are in line with institutional demands rather than learner needs (although the latter was seen as the sole purpose). It is useful to think about the extent to which this analysis could be used to describe the effects of observation practices used by Quality and Ofsted and explore whether the mechanisms of power always stay powerful in this context. An

analysis of this kind would aim to investigate complex realities in plural circumstances that sway the balance of power in the sector. These angles are pertinent to the notion of power that is linked to knowledge in FE – it is a political matter. A detailed investigation may reveal the subtext of these policies and how they affect teachers and their practices. Whether it is the wordings of quality improvement policies or how teachers describe the course of observation practices – nothing can be taken for granted.

That is the key argument. For Foucault 'What is said?' is of least importance for political reasons. His interests lie in exploring the background and history of 'things said'. For him, this means that from a linguistic and a logical point of view, the possibilities of 'what can be said' are countless. However, 'given the sheer volume of what could be "correctly" said, only a small proportion is *actually* said' (Bacchi and Bonham, 2014, p. 179). This small proportion is what gets Foucault's attention and what he wants to discover more about. He is less interested in utterances but keen on investigating the history of 'what is said' and how statements may get their power from a particular discourse. And therein lies another important facet of political practices. What could have been said but was not said is not because of the limitations of cognitive processing or some kind of memory deficiencies in individuals. It is to do with how institutions regulate discourses and employ the process of exclusion described as 'prohibition' by Foucault; for sure, this places very many limitations on possibilities of what can be said and what counts as knowledge (Mills, 2005, p. 57). 'Disciplines allow people to speak "in the true", that is within the realm of what is considered true within that discipline' (ibid, p. 62). In this sense, questions such as, 'What is it possible to speak of?' are of vital importance in Foucault's school of thought. Within the analytic framework of discursive practices, political agendas and power relations play a vital role in the emergence and development of every discourse and that includes the discourse of education. In order to explore connections between teaching and learning policies and teaching practices, a detailed analysis of how the quality improvement rhetoric is translated into action by various actors in the field is required. How do senior managers interpret policies and how they are seen by teachers? What this type of analysis would focus on would be the fact that material and symbolic factors within 'things said', and the relationship between people and material elements gives the actual meaning to a linguistic structure. Surely the meaning of what people describe as 'true' would then need to be analysed in terms of the following questions:

- How is it possible to say certain things?

- On what basis is it possible?

- How things "in the true" could be or are accepted as knowledge? (Bacchi and Bonham, 2014, p. 179)

My point is this. The narrative of 'good practice' in any discourse would have political origins and implications. Practitioners in a community may or may not be fully in tune with those implications despite claiming to have a conscious awareness of it. 'Communities of practitioners sustain their practices by negotiating and discussing what is a good practice, which of them is better... when a practice should be changed and how, or whether it should be discarded' (Gherardi, 2012, p. 27). In this context, it not just the linguistic meaning, but the non-human elements such as the space and layout in staffrooms and information technology as well as symbolic factors for example practitioners' role, authority and status that will determine how power and agency are distributed. The agreed definition of things 'in the true' will be informed by what is prohibited, allowable and promoted by institutions and fits the requirements of the definition of knowledge. In the above example therefore the actual 'discussion' on good practice is not as important as the analysis of rules that dictate the discussion. In other words, 'how it becomes possible to say (or know) certain things? For Foucault, '"rules" are *sets of relationships*, "a complex group of relations that *function as a rule* [emphasis in original] (Foucault in Bacchi and Bonham, 2014, p. 180).

Therefore, in order to understand discursive practices better, we need to be able to find the connections that form sets of relationships. This could be done by comparing individuals, situations and examples - by looking at differences between managers' positions and teachers' positions and their share in the production of quality assurance knowledge emerging from multiple, interacting discourses. For example, how one person is in a slightly better position than the other/s in terms of ownership of knowledge and what made that possible in the first place. '... the purpose of the comparison is to casually connect the cases' instead of analysing them in isolation (Gherardi, 2012, p. 19).

Drawing on interconnections would perhaps enable us to identify 'what could be said correctly' is in fact 'said', what made it possible and how 'rules' are formed. Since 'rules' are seen as 'sets of relations', the connections between various elements would enable us to move away from looking at different entities separately and as a result identify what links one thing to the other in a certain context. For example, what happens in a classroom to what goes on in high-powered offices of policy makers and managers.

4.5.1.   The statement

'What people say' is described as 'the statement' in Foucault's work on discourse, but it is not an utterance (Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1982, p. 45). For example, an utterance can be made up of various statements depending on its function according to a particular context, or different utterances can be part of the same statement. An example of that would be the announcement that conveys the same message in different languages by airline pilots. 'Maps can be statements, if they are representations of geographical area, and even a picture of the layout of a typewriter keyboard can be a statement if it appears in a manual as a representation of the way letters of a keyboard are standardly arranged' (ibid). For Foucault, it is the utterances with 'institutional force' that make truth-claims 'and which are ratified as knowledge can be classified as statements' (Mills, 2005, p. 55). As Foucault puts it:

It is always possible one could speak the truth in a void; one would only be in the

true, however, if one obeyed the rules of some discursive police which would have

to be reactivated every time one spoke.

(Foucault, 1972, p. 224).

Foucault describes his approaches to knowledge as an archaeology. An archaeological analysis involves exploring the support system that controls the mechanism of statements in terms of their production and ordering. Above all, it explores how this mechanism excludes some statements from the status of being 'in the true', and as a result they fall in the category of statements too (Mills, 2005).

In summary, in Foucault's archaeology 'the statement' is seen as an event rather than a unit of speech. In other words, it is the process behind the construction of written or spoken texts that matters more than what is said. What makes it possible for statements to be said and how something comes into existence in a particular context in relation to its materiality will help us understand the role and effects of a statement (Bacchi and Bonham, 2014).

Is there some kind of FE discursive police? If so, what are its rules? What utterances qualify to be identified as statements? How is the institutional force provided to statements that are embedded in materiality - for example, in the working timetables of different actors such as teachers and managers, their salaries, official remit, location and condition of staffrooms and other administrative and electronic resources at their disposal? A critical examination of the archaeology of quality assurance policies will help us understand the nature of the process behind their construction and the type of teaching practices they want to produce. This is particularly so in relation to observation policies and practices in ESOL. Policies here refer to 'any course of action … relating to the selection of goals, the definition of values or the allocation of resources... policy is about the exercise of political power and the language that is used to legitimate that process' (Olssen et al., 2004, pp. 71-72). What is the information base behind 'statements' that dictate the formulation of observation policies? If we want to understand the significance of links between how everyday teaching practices are linked to quality policies – this is in the social and historical context in which they take place – '… it is necessary to explain the material conditions within which' policies and practices 'are produced and to examine critically the institutional practices which they are used to defend' (Olssen et al., 2004, pp. 71-72).

4.5.2.   Limitations and exclusions

What is permitted in terms of what can be said and what counts as knowledge encapsulates the process of exclusion and limitations. Mills (2005) has discussed these procedures, identified as 'prohibition' or 'taboo' by Foucault, at length. For example, it is not easy to talk about subjects such as sex and death within Western societies. In fact, it was relatively more difficult to talk about sex in the Victorian period. There are discursive and institutional limitations that work to make these discussions difficult: limitations which become deeply entrenched within contexts and cultures at

different periods over the years, otherwise there is nothing inherently wrong or taboo about these subjects.

It will be useful to trace the origins of knowledge that not only define 'good practice' in FE, but also places limitations on teaching practices. What can be discussed and if there is a taboo on any sort of assertions? What can be questioned and what rules are non-negotiable? Are there any teachers who believe that inspection frameworks designed to control, and shape teaching practices may not be the best way to assure quality? If so, are they seen as deviant and then subtly excluded from their community of practice, or are there any attempts of creating desire within themselves to conform to the norms of quality assurance agendas?

If we ask how quality improvement policies are linked to teaching practices, there is a need for analysis that can determine the contemporary rules of statement, limitations, exclusion and knowledge formation in FE quality improvement policies and practices such as classroom observations. The objective is, as Foucault puts it, to point out 'kinds of assumptions... familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought ... to show that things are not as self-evident as we believed, to see what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such' (1988b, p. 154). What is happening in FE at present? What forms the basis of contemporary institutional reasoning behind existing pedagogical discourses? What is the existing character of knowledge, what are its limits and who owns knowledge at the moment? To answer these questions, we will have to closely examine the background and function of what is said instead of analysing the meanings of it. We will have to explore how 'what is said' coalesces with practices and materialities to construct multi-faceted 'reals' and 'truths'. It is the question, what makes 'the real' real in this context that I am interested in.

4.6. Data collection

Apart from a thorough investigation of teaching, learning and assessment policy documents, six FE teachers, who teach maths and English to ESOL students, were interviewed outside the classroom, and their teaching practice was observed in at least six different lessons inside the classroom. Two members of the senior management team were interviewed in their offices. Teachers selected for interviews were all very experienced and from a range of levels and classes they teach; that is they

were not teaching the same level and same age group. The advantage of this was that it provided a very clear picture of a range of perspectives informed by a variety of teaching contexts. One teacher taught maths to ESOL students. Indeed, it also helped me understand individual variations that pertain to context-specific situations based on level-specific factors.

Interviews with teachers were conducted in two different settings on two occasions in an attempt to incorporate different aspects of pre and post observation orientation. Each interview lasted for an hour to ninety minutes. Observing teachers' attitudes and practices in their classroom was a pivotal part of the study; therefore, teachers delivered some lessons in my presence allowing me to interpret and attach meaning to their practice and also discuss various dimensions of it with them later.

There were no access issues as it is part of my job to observe other teachers and interact with the senior managers dealing with curriculum, quality, teaching and learning. Professional-pedagogical and other relevant behaviour was observable in the staffrooms and meetings to which I had easy access. The information gathered through these social settings was particularly handy during the analysis of ICT systems and other non-human factors and how power and agency is distributed. Apart from semi-structured interviews, there were also informal conversations with the teachers I observed in their classrooms. It was useful to draw on my own teaching experience and contextual knowledge to develop discussions and form questions as the research proceeded. Additionally, I examined a variety of data sources: for example, student surveys, data collected during learning walks and audits, official documents, teachers' reflections and observations.

All participants were asked to complete consent forms which will be retained for at least 5 years from the date at which the project is completed. The college and the individual teachers cannot be identifiable in this study as the real name of the institution is not used and the detailed accounts of the interactions are kept pseudonymous. The data is stored in my personal computer, flash drive and online cloud memory and all of these are securely password protected. I transcribed the data myself. Hard copies such as interview notes, photographs video/audio clips are kept securely locked away in a locked filing cabinet in my house. Audio recordings were converted into texts and all data was anonymised before being stored**.**

4.6.1.   Participants

The following six participants were observed and interviewed before and after their lessons:

- Deborah - ESOL and accounting teacher

- Charlotte - ESOL and literacy teacher

- Gloria - ESOL teacher

- Luke - ESOL and maths teacher

- Alice - ESOL teacher

- Gabriella - ESOL and English teacher.

The following two members of the senior management team were interviewed in their offices:

- Simon - College Principal and Chief Executive Officer

- Hector - Director of Quality Improvement, Teaching and Learning

4.7. Data analysis

This is an analysis of how quality improvement measures and teaching practices interact in Further Education, the approach therefore identifies the links and conflicts between the two and explores their consequences through an analysis of observation practices and their implications for teaching practices. The primary concern of the analysis lies with the unnoticeable and subtle dimensions of quality improvement policies in an attempt to understand not only what, but also why and how certain discourses of quality assurance exist and how they link with what happens in classrooms and teaching staffrooms on a day-to-day basis.

I carried out qualitative research with an exploratory approach to collect and analyse data. To understand the nature and impact of different quality improvement measures including observations in a given context, the study gives a detailed description of teachers' experience of going through the whole process. 'For a study focusing on individual lived experience, it could be argued that one cannot understand human actions without understanding the meaning that participants attribute to these actions, their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds'. (Marshall and Rossman 2010, p. 57). To achieve this, I conducted semi-structured interviews with practitioners, which was a practical way to gain firsthand insights into the phenomena of supervised teaching. Interviews are 'a uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the lived experiences and lived meanings of the subject'. (Kvale, 2007, p. 11). Not having a fixed pattern in

interviews created more room for the interviewees to express their thoughts more freely and talk about other related issues that were relevant to the main points of discussion around my research question. Moreover, it provided arenas where a range of unexpected themes did appear from the interviews (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) suggest, the data was analysed while it was being collected.

At the first stage I read and re-read the data, noted down important aspects and wrote summaries of what I had come across during the process of research. I then examined the important aspects of gathered data and, based on the available evidence, wrote a qualitative description of the mechanisms whereby ESOL teachers and curriculum and quality managers took up specific discursive stances and communicated them through particular teaching and observation practices. In the final stage, there was an attempt to generalise the key elements and generate a thesis derived from the data (ibid). The objective is to explore the system of quality improvement in FE through 'utterances and texts which make some form of truth claim and … are ratified as knowledge' and may 'be classified as statements' and acts and utterances that are 'excluded from the position of being "in the true" …' (Mills, 2005, p. 55). The focus of the analysis is more concerned with the exploration of teachers' views and understandings of the political dimensions of the observation practices.

The data collected from different sources was put into different emerging themes and categories. The main focus was to find connections by comparing different situations and examples. '… the purpose of the comparison is to casually connect the cases instead of reducing cases to instances of general law, …each case' should 'work in its connection to other cases' (Gherardi, 2012, p. 19). Various teaching practices that, on the surface, appear different in nature are not usually poles apart. For example, planning lessons, delivering them in the classroom, talking about them in staffrooms, operating according to standard policies and protocols, or any dissenting acts or voices in and outside the classroom are all interconnected. In other words, within the existing discursive framework in FE, which teaching methods are regarded to have more value, and how certain arguments have more worth than others, can be seen in connection with the dominant political discourses (such as neoliberalism) which keep certain pedagogical proposition in circulation. An example of this could be how certain attempts to make learning more calculable and teachers more accountable may be informed by a business model of education.

In essence, this methodology allowed me to move my argument from one direction to another and analyse interconnections; what happens in a classroom to what goes on in high-powered offices of policy makers and managers.

> '[P]ractices rest on other practices... and their interconnection makes it possible to shift the analysis from a practice to a field of practices which contains it, and vice versa. The concept of "texture of practices" conveys the image of shifting the analysis to follow the connections in action and investigating how action connects or disconnects' (Gherardi, 2012, pp. 155-56).

For example, when teachers are encouraged to try new ideas to improve their practice or asked to demonstrate certain standards in their teaching, it is appropriate to identify who creates such 'ideas' and why and how they seek to promote them. What is the pedagogical real in FE and how is it produced, negotiated, distributed and imposed on ESOL teachers? What discursive structures or systems of beliefs lie behind the discourse of improvement in teaching? And how are these discourses and structures, which manifest power relations, linked to teaching practices and how teachers discipline themselves by bringing their teaching in line with the Ofsted real?

Additionally, I explored the modes of dissent from the real and how they impact and contribute to the production of new subjectivities. This is perhaps where policy frameworks, which involve quality assurance guidelines seem to be connected with what happens in classrooms. Personally, like Foucault, I am keen to look into these connections by analysing various truths or dominant discourses and how they are produced, displaced and renewed, and 'not interested in which discourse is a true or accurate representation of the 'only' "real" in this case' (Mills, 2005, p. 17).

In other words, instead of looking at various accounts and instances separately, it was therefore important to examine relationships in which one thing is linked or associated with something else. In this case it is about exploring links between quality assurance and observation policies and teaching practices as mooted in the main research question. For that reason, I needed a supporting theoretical framework around which this analysis could be developed and one that would provide a

means to use the data for detailed exploration in ways which represent contradictory forms of subjectivity. In order to explore the wide array of effects of recent policy developments in FE, and the ways they are translated into teaching experiences and generate meaning in and outside of the classroom, I used an investigative framework derived from the Foucauldian concept of discursive practices to describe the texture and weave of FE teaching practices. The concept of discursive practices allows us to challenge assumptions about fixed social realities and experiences. The Foucauldian view of discursive practices questions widely held beliefs about current structures of social institutions and different subject positions available to their subjects. Foucault proposed this approach to understand and explain connections between knowledge, power, subjectivity, institutions and language (Weedon, 1987). Foucauldian analysis allows for an understanding of 'regimes of truth' that inform quality improvement measures in FE at present. This is by questioning the ownership of knowledge, exploring what counts as knowledge and analysing modes of thought which function to legitimise regimes.

Along with the initial introduction of the Foucauldian frame of reference in relation to Bourdieusian theoretical perspectives in the previous section, further discussion of Foucault's archaeological and genealogical methods in the following section creates a hope that by the end of this chapter, the reader will have been presented with a strong rationale for choosing one theoretical method over another.

So, how can Foucault's approach be translated into a method within a qualitative framework and work in practice? A Foucauldian framework will make the analysis possible at three levels in this context.

1. At first, examine how and where 'institutional-discursive apparatuses' are 'inextricably linked together' in the development and practice of quality assurance mechanisms. For example, an agreement among different stakeholders on mechanisms for improving teaching standards.
2. Explore how and where 'institutional-discursive apparatuses conflict' such as in a disagreement between teachers and policy makers over teaching, learning and assessment standards and practices.

3. Investigate social structure – relationship between power, knowledge and bodies 'within a particular historical period' and use genealogy to understand the 'ideological forces' behind FE operation (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 53).

social and institutional structures

subjectivities knowledge power

connections

conflicts

agreements

hierarchies

teachers' discursive practices

observation policies, quality assurance and improvement discourses

political and ideological formations behind quality improvement polices teaching practices

observation and compliance schemes
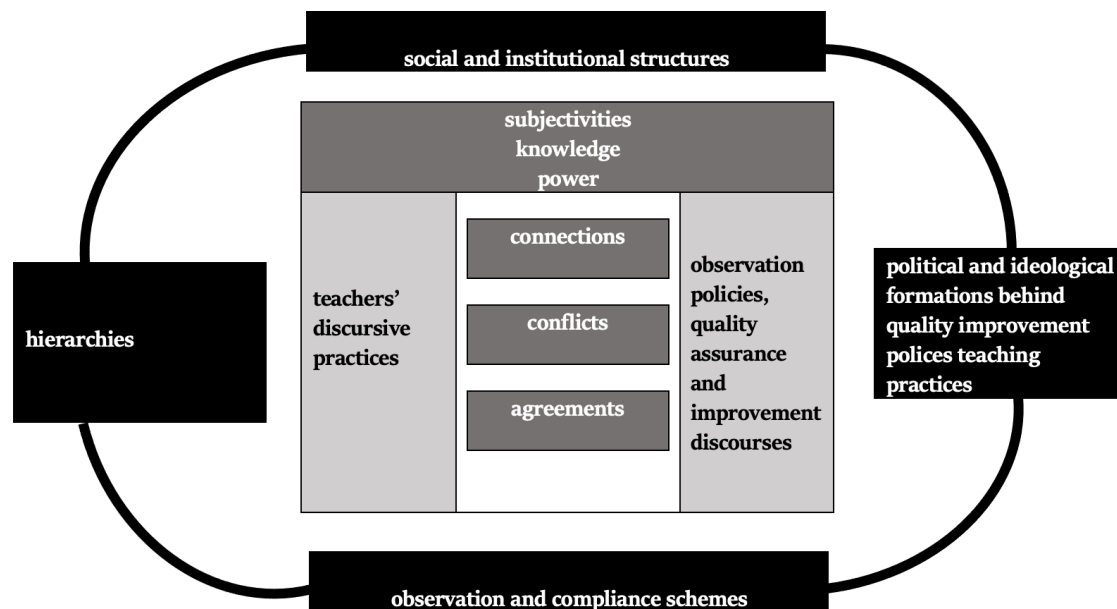
Figure 3: Based on Foucault's archaeology and genealogy

Foucault's methodological insights provide tools for exposing relationships between the discursive and the material. This is to look at non-human factors such as policy documents and how different agents, such as teachers and managers, in the field engage with those factors; in addition, to study how alliances are formed and what some of the historical reasons behind emerging conflicts via genealogy are. How policies affect practices and impact teachers is analysed through the language that underpins the experiences of the key actors in the business – mainly teachers, for example how teachers themselves see their roles and practices and what language they use to describe it. Foucault's archaeology and genealogy lay the foundation for an approach to the analysis of quality assurance processes in teaching practices and their constitution as a political discourse (ibid).

In proposing a framework for the data analysis of quality assurance policies and observation practices, it is crucial to keep in mind that I did not simply want to analyse the interview transcripts – rather, I looked at material resources such as documents, facilities, technology and how various observation practices produce meaning in a range of situations. My adoption of Foucault's genealogy and archaeology required a focus on the social and material elements of the system of rules that

produces observation practices in FE as opposed to just doing a linguistic discourse analysis which is concerned with written or spoken texts. This is the main reason why Foucault's conception of discourse is useful for a political analysis of quality assurance mechanisms with a clearly defined focus upon the relationship between observation policies and teaching practices, the social conditions in which they take place and the organisational contexts in a historical perspective.

A Foucauldian approach is concerned with the dynamics of process rather than merely describing the dimensions of the product. In other words, looking at how teaching practices that are perceived more 'valid' came into existence and evolved, takes precedence over the linguistic description of the merits or demerits of such practices. Trying to look at 'what was silently articulated "beyond", in the text' in observation policies has priority over trying to discover the 'real' meaning of it (Foucault, 1981a, p. 58). For example, the analysis does not just revolve around describing existing practices, but it deals with how an experienced teacher instinctively knows what they 'ought to' and 'ought not to' do when they are being observed. How do these decisions interact with the norms and strategies proposed in quality improvement meetings? What are the other factors and resources that influence teachers' particular behaviour? This approach stems from theories of praxis which instead of looking at different instances of teaching and observation practices separately, lends an ecological perspective to complex adaptive systems in context. Unlike theories of action, theories of praxis emphasise an enacted process and the way in which a particular behaviour is produced, and certain conduct is organised and performed (Cohen, 1996). This is the essence of the conception of creativity discussed in the literature review.

Using an ecological model requires connecting human actors to materiality and knowing how agency is reconfigured as a result of this connection between the social world and materiality (Latour, 2005 in Gherardi, 2010). This position is similar to that taken up by Barry in his work, *Political Machines: governing a technological society* (2001), who argues that materials can turn political '...in the sense that... any attempt to contest or challenge the social order may then involve -and probably will involve – an effort to contest the development and deployment of technology' or other artefacts 'as well'. 'This contestation of technical designs and practices may open up new objects and sites of politics' (ibid., 2001, p. 9).

Thinking about how the social and the material are integrated in Foucauldianism, it is important to

emphasise that in educational practices, human actors are inseparable from documents, for example from planning teaching sessions to discussions in team meetings, and the ways policies are interpreted in FE colleges - everything is documented. The development and implementation of various documents affects practitioners' understanding and their ability to act and respond in different situations. New alignments can be formed, or industrial actions can be called as a result of fierce contention over a piece of paper. '...materials experience an emancipation from their role as passive recipients and start to co-articulate agency and shape political practices' (Muller, 2015, p. 34).

In order to analyse actions taken to negotiate power relations, nowhere can this circumstance of plurality of interactions between humans and non-humans be more evident than in an ecological framework such as an approach based on Foucauldian discourse analysis. This is because in Foucault's work, meaning is plural and not fixed, specific historical analysis is more important than reproductive patterns, and subject positions are open to change rather than absolute. Material structures and specific material power relations have a significant impact on discursive practices and how people resist power even in the absence of any choice. In order to uncover and analyse a particular regime of power, teachers' subjective experiences need to be given an expression. The frames to discuss those expressions need not be specific to pre-determined economic factors as is the case in Marxism. It is based on a conception of power whereby 'it does not simply work in one direction from the powerful to the powerless.' It '... needs a network of relations, which includes resistance to it, even to exist' (Beighton, 2012, p. 20). A Foucauldian perspective denies the possibility of knowing power structures in advance. 'The process of analysis involves the production of what is itself a discourse on power, which is never definitive and is always shaped by the concerns of the moment in which it is produced' (Weedon, 1987, p. 115). In other words, it is the factors that are historically and socially specific to a particular situation in a particular context and setting at a particular time that enable individuals to see language beyond fixed 'truths' and 'common sense'; they open possibilities of a variety of discursive systems of meaning (ibid). Foucauldian analysis allows the description of different components of various practices, how they work and looks at the links between a range of social and material aspects.

4.8. Using Foucault to unpack the research question

Indeed, it is important to explain the efficacy of quality assurance agendas and how they inform different observation practices. But what is more important is what makes these agendas necessary in the first place; the political origins of pedagogical guidelines and how certain teaching practices are normalised and used to prepare 'bodies' for responsible teaching conduct. What hidden forms of power are at work, and how are they reshaped when and if they meet resistance? What the contemporary modes of discipline and punish in FE and the types of teaching practices the state requires are and what might be consequence for deviance. How the policy makers ensure surveillance and maintain control. In the absence of any apparent coercion and suppression, how institutional monitoring is used to internalise disciplinary techniques for self-regulation.

From writing lesson plans to delivering input for students, how teachers might self-regulate and remind themselves what they 'should' or 'should not' do? How does the 'material' - such as spatial distribution at the local level, wordings in documents, the boundaries of teachers' and managers' remits, exclusions and limitations in team meetings, group emails and access to certain physical and virtual spaces – connect with the 'social' such as how teaching bodies behave in classrooms, staffrooms, meetings and CPD sessions? The tools of Foucauldian discourse analysis help us account for all these aspects that lie at the root of my main research question which is concerned with pointing out connections between quality improvement and observation schemes and teaching practices. (Pylypa, 1998).

CHAPTER 5

5. The world of Northlands College

Northlands College is a large Further Education college with two campuses. Before 2019, the college had three campuses across London. The structure of the college was a result of a merger between two colleges in 2012. Previously these were two separate organisations in two different boroughs. The college offers a wide range of vocational courses to young people aged sixteen to nineteen and adults. Along with a broad selection of full-time courses, the college offers part time, evening, short and online courses. In early 2018, Northlands College became part of Southwest Regional Colleges (SRC); a group that has 4 colleges and around 1500 staff spread across 17 locations.

Between 2012 and 2018, the college operated at 3 different sites and the newest college campus had undergone a £41 million renovation. Most of the senior management meetings took place in this beautifully appointed building in the centre of the town. The new building is spacious and gives a corporate look with keyless entry to carpeted classrooms equipped with large interactive screens, modern air-conditioning and heating facilities as well as three different lifts at two locations within the foyer of the building, a wide wooden staircase sweeping up to the first floor greets the visitors as they go past the reception area. There is another stunning spiral staircase, on the right, going up to the third floor which simply adds to its elegance. From the reception area, an open-interior floor plan juts out from the upper stories giving a subtle hint of what is to come – modern computer screens, large round tables and extensive use of glass and steel in the building material. The natural light reflecting off the angled ceiling and into the space, covered in warm colours, makes it feel even larger and lighter. The contactless ID cards are sophisticatedly programmed to operate doors, photocopiers and printing machines. However, this large and impressive building has a tiny library space with limited stock of books and e-learning resources. Each staffroom for teachers has basic facilities such as a sink, a kettle, a microwave and cupboards. These average-sized rooms are cramped with 6 to 10 teachers sitting next to each other. It would appear that teachers are bound to lose their momentum on lesson planning or whatever they are working on as they unavoidably hear people eating, taking calls, typing, sneezing and coughing constantly even when there are no loud conversations. These front-line staff do not seem to have any control over their workspace since

everyone can hear every conversation about everything and nothing stops anyone from looking over another's shoulder and making a comment on what they are doing on their computer screen.

The other two campuses are not new and quite different from this chic building. One of the old campuses (campus 2) mainly runs courses in construction trade whereas the other campus (campus 3) has a wide range of courses and facilities such as a drama theatre, dance studio, beauty salon, science labs, music editing rooms, multiple kitchens for catering students etc. This (campus 3) is the largest campus with the largest student population and has two buildings with a central quadrangle: the New building and the Old building. The principalship, senior executives' offices, HR, MIS (student management information system), Quality assurance offices are all based on the ground floor of the New building. There are classrooms on the first and second floor, and students have to go to the third floor in order to use the library. This New building has fairly good sanitary conditions as, unlike the old building, water closets do not scream out for new fittings and scrubbing. Apart from classrooms, there are staffrooms for teachers and people who work in the middle management, student support and customer service offices. This building can get really cold in the winter as it has high ceilings, small radiators and single-glazed windows. This sometimes causes difficulty for students as they are not allowed to keep their coats on while they are in their lessons because they are told that they need to be 'classroom ready' when they are in classrooms and keeping their jackets and coats on would suggest the contrary. On the other hand, the New building in campus 3 is equipped with a modern heating system.

This old building of campus 3 was built in the late 1920s. It is an impressive brown brick building with artful architectural embellishments. These embellishments represent various trades and skills and are reminiscent of guild insignia or even aristocratic coats of arms, conveying somehow the fact that trades and skills are noble, rooted in history and something to be proud of - perhaps unthinkable in these times. One cannot miss a series of ceramic plaques and tiled designs of stylised animals along the façade before approaching the timbered main doors which are colossal and give the building its character. There is a customer service centre on the right-hand side and a waiting area on the left-hand side as soon as one walks through the main doors. College ID cards allow students and staff access to the building.

It is this remarkable building where ESOL is based and where I started my teaching at this college 14 years ago. Now, this building was going to be the hub of my research project.

5.1. Managing my subjectivity

5.1.1. Reflexivity

As a researcher, I was a key part of this research as I work in the same college and have been working in the sector for over a decade. In this sense, I consider myself an insider. The positioning of the researcher as an insider and outsider has been discussed in literature at length (see Bridges 2017; Crossley et al. 2016; Griffith 1998; Hellawell 2006). In social research, insiders are the members of 'specified groups and collectivities or occupants of specified social statuses; outsiders are the non-members' (Merton 1972, p.21). As an insider, examining my own working environment was a tough task because my presence was twisted together with the dynamics of social relations and political conditions that outsiders were rarely privy to; therefore, I really struggled to abandon or even park my *insideness*. . I had to take a cautious approach in developing my understanding of the emerging themes and how my interpretation of those themes should not be influenced by my own subjective experiences (Fay 1996).

Merton (1972, p.11) argues that an insider does not necessarily have 'monopolistic access' to knowledge, and one does not need to be the member of a particular groups to have a real understanding of the social relations and practices within that group. Outsiders can be better placed to examine organisations and the culture of social institutions objectively by capitalising on their detachment. At times it may not be possible for insiders to be completely detached from internal conflicts and therefore produce an analysis that is not influenced by personal beliefs and feelings at all. Nonetheless, Merton acknowledges that both insiders and outsiders have their exclusive roles in fact finding processes, and both have their distinctive assets and liabilities. One of those assets, as an insider, for me was to exploit my greater understating of the institutional culture and develop authentic understanding of the key issues by having semi-formal interactions in a natural fashion

My insider status enabled me to have quick and secure access to the participants and their classroom, and I was able to use my contextual knowledge to make informed decisions about data collection. For example, in the exploratory phase, instead of surveying the context before deciding on the main

focus, I spent a fair amount of time considering the complexities of my study and how I could collect data in order to develop an analysis that extended to all facets of the research question in this study. Following Holliday's (2002) advice, I tried to turn my fly-on-the-wall presence into a research strategy and a data source which I was able to capitalise upon in a methodical fashion. To do this, instead of pretending to occlude or mystify subjectivity, I kept and provided a satisfactory record of whenever it came to play. Therefore, 'rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher, we should set about understanding them…The fact that the researcher may play an important part in shaping the context becomes central to the analysis. Indeed, it is exploited for all it's worth' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, pp. 6-18). My data collection process did not require me to focus on finding ways to make the participants comfortable, establish a good relationship or to put them at ease when they were being interviewed. I wanted the reader to be aware of my role in the study, and I also invite them to look out for any issues around the approach used to interpret and attach meaning to policy texts and teachers' experiences.

5.1.2.   The ever-changing conditions and me

I started working as an ESOL lecturer at Northlands College in 2007 on a temporary contract. It was my third teaching job. My employment offer was conditional because although I had an MA in language teaching and Applied Linguistics, I did not have a recognised teaching qualification. I was asked to enrol on CELTA (Certificate in Teaching to Speakers of other Languages). I started attending my CELTA sessions and also began my teaching and tutoring responsibilities in the college at the same time. Completing CELTA, still, did not give me Qualified Teaching Status (QTS). Two years later, when I applied for a permanent position and my contract was changed after going through an interview, I also started working towards another teaching qualification DTLLS (Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector) – a teaching qualification recognised in the English public sector. A few years later, I also completed another diploma, DELTA (Diploma in Teaching English to Students of other Languages) and started working as a CELTA and PGCE trainer. In 2015, my job role changed from being an ESOL lecturer to an Advanced practitioner. I was no longer based in the ESOL department and started working in the Quality department. I still maintained a close relationship with ESOL managers and teachers. My new job role involved delivering CPD (continuous professional development) sessions, carrying out developmental observations of new

and experienced teachers, coaching and mentoring trainee teachers and doing audits of teachers' planning documentation.

At the time, there were two types of classroom observations carried out in the college. The first was graded observation in which line managers made judgements on the effectiveness of the lessons they observed for 45 to 60 minutes. Teachers were given a grade from 1 to 4; grade 1 meant 'outstanding', grade 2 was 'good', grade 3 meant 'requires improvement' and a grade 4 lesson was deemed 'inadequate'. This model was used by Ofsted to grade lessons as well as institutions during external visits. The graded observations were then replaced by 'standards' observations in 2016. This was influenced by a shift in Ofsted's policy with the removal of observation policy from their inspection framework in 2014/15. Like some other colleges and schools, Northlands College also followed suit. In standard observations, observers used 5 standards (Planning, Progress, Assessment for Learning, Learner Management, Developing Maths and English) to form judgements about the effectiveness of teaching. These observations were also carried out by HODs (Heads of Department) and used as part of the appraisal process. If a teacher did not meet 3 or more standards, they were referred to Quality and put on a six-week coaching programme. At the end of the coaching programme, those teachers had to undergo another standard observation and a failure to meet 3 or more standards, again, would result in capability processes with more frequent observations and stringent coaching measures. The second type of observation was carried out by our team of 4 improvement practitioners (initially a team of 7, reduced to 4 as a result of restructuring in 2017). These were non-judgemental observations and involved a pre-observation discussion also known as TLC1 (Teaching and Learning Conversation), 30 to 45-minute observation of a taught session, followed by verbal and written feedback (TLC2). Developmental observations are arranged with all new teachers and also with some experienced teachers referred by their head of department. These referrals would usually be a result of teacher's performance in their standard observation or student complaints. There are no consequences attached to these observations, and the reports are, normally, not shared with line managers. Although teachers were told that they can be more experimental with their teaching in developmental observations, IPs (Improvement Practitioners) used Ofsted standards as a guide to provide verbal and written feedback to teachers.

In 2018, standard observations were scrapped too. The head of the Quality Unit decided to introduce learning walks to get a snapshot of what the teaching is like in a particular department. Learning walks involve a number of visits to several different classrooms one after the other. A 10 to 15-minute brief classroom visit to each lesson is used to measure teacher performance in a particular curriculum area in order to identify strengths and determine areas for development. A deputy head of an academy writes in his blog that learning walks '…are designed to be less intense than a full observation, aiming to reduce the time and resources needed to prepare. They are also intended to be carried out more frequently, to eliminate conclusions being drawn from a "one-off" bad day in amongst an academic year of hundreds of lessons'. These learning walks are themed; for example, they may only focus on one or two areas for development, such as student progress and learner management, usually taken from the weaknesses identified in the latest Ofsted report. At Northlands college, the team of IPs, director of Quality and heads of departments use learning walks to collect data that gives a sense of quality of teaching across a particular department rather than to provide judgements on the performance of individual teachers.

2019 started with more changes. The three campuses were demerged as two separate colleges again. Campus 1 was given its old name back with its own principal, and campus 2 and 3 stayed as Northlands College with another newly appointed principal. I stayed at Northlands college and continued my research in campus 3 here. Both new colleges continue to be part of and centrally managed by SRC. The two newly appointed leaders made some changes to the structure of both colleges. They reintroduced a structure that was in place at the time of the initial merger 10 years ago. HODs were given additional responsibilities and made in charge of faculties, and the role of CM (Curriculum Manager) was brought back too. The position of Director of Quality was changed and the job was somewhat downgraded to Head of Quality. Head of Maths and Head of English positions were made redundant and ESOL Heads of Faculties were made in charge of these two key cross college areas. My job role also changed slightly, and I was promoted (after another job interview and assessment) to a Quality Improvement Lead with an additional responsibility to line manage a small team of IPs and to write learning walk feedback reports for Heads of Faculties. The new leader also brought a slightly different version of graded observations back with 3 performance indicators instead of 4 grades or 5 standards. These are called, 'Independent', Supported Coaching' and 'Intensive Coaching'. After observation, if a teacher is deemed 'independent', there will be no further

observations for them in that academic year. The 'supported coaching' outcome requires a time-bound action plan and a reobservation within 6 weeks. Despite the proviso of having reobservation, 'supported coaching' is directed with a light touch. It was the 'intensive coaching' indicator that created an uproar amongst teaching staff as it was seen an equivalent to grade 4 or 'inadequate' in the previous model. In the new policy, intensive coaching will trigger off a formal three-way meeting; the teacher recommended for an 'intensive coaching' programme will discuss and agree an action plan with their line manager and their observer followed by stringent guidelines about weekly meetings with an IP for the next six weeks before another observation takes place. The link to capability procedure was removed as part of an ongoing discussion process with UCU.

The new academic year in 2020 brought another change for me as I decided to say goodbye to my role in Quality and applied for a Curriculum Manager role in ESOL department. I was back in ESOL after four years.

If there is such a thing as déjà vu, the Northlands college staff experience it right now in the same way as many FE colleges have experienced it before. Unpredictability, volatility, reappearance and change are some of the words that seek to define Further Education in Britain – an area which has been underfunded and undervalued hence also known as the 'Cinderella Sector' – an expression first used by Kenneth Baker who served as Secretary of State for Education in the late 80s.

5.2.   Ethics and power relations

My ethics application was approved in the beginning of 2020, but I want to briefly discuss the issue of power distribution between me, as a researcher, and the participants, so the reader has no doubts or confusions about my intentions or the context which may lead to misinterpretations of various parts of this study.

It is important to clairfy that I was not any of the interviewees' line manager. Based on some of my previous conversations with a number of teachers, I know that a significant number of teachers wanted to be included in such research projects to fulfil their professional interests as well as to be part of something that might inform future policies and practices. The potential participants had already shown significant levels of interest and willingness to share their experiences in a study such as this. Oftentimes teachers' concerns and voice are missing in quality agendas and initiatives. 'It is

all top-down, we want to be heard', one teacher told me. Therefore, it was crucial to emphasise that these interviews or observations were not part of any of the quality assurance mechanisms and participants were not under any obligation to participate; they had an option to withdraw their consent at any stage of the process.

The yearly observations at the college are planned, organised and mainly executed by Curriculum Managers and Heads of Faculties. The Quality department sometimes is asked to help out. I did not carry out any observations on teachers who I knew in social capacity and I was not going to be observing any of the participants as part of the college observation cycle. I have been in the organisation for nearly 13 years and I share a friendly relationship with the teaching staff. My own teaching responsibilities, as a teacher educator, also make my role completely nonthreatening and create a feeling of empathy amongst teachers. The participants were all fully aware that I had no control or power over them so their relationship with me is based on trust and understanding; all of them have known me for a number of years, worked with me or attended my professional development sessions. They contributed their experiences and stories in their chosen way; there was no supremacy of the researcher. The interviews were not held in a formal, authoritative or structured atmosphere; therefore, their knowledge of my role, setting and contextual relevance created a non-hierarchical environment of power equality. Like Burawoy (1998, p. 8), as an insider, I was well placed to observe different types of behaviours outside the interview and classrooms and became an 'active contributor' to informal discussions too; however, I was completely honest, with the people around me, about the information I was going to use and checked at each stage if they were happy for me to do so. No information from spoken or written discourse is used if the contributor/s were not comfortable with the idea.

The manner and the context in which participants were asked to take part and the nature of our roles as well as their knowledge about the research and the researcher leaves no question marks over the issues of confidentiality, ethical dilemmas, privacy, informed consent, social justice and power relations.

6. Data analysis 1 (policy analysis)

6.1. Sustaining the neoliberal ideology: modes of regulation, control and evaluation in FE inspection policy

This chapter performs a critical examination of the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF), which was accompanied by an Inspection Handbook for Further Education and Skills, and argues that this policy document reinforces the neoliberal project in education. Drawing on concepts from Michel Foucault's analysis of the nature and effects of marketisation and surveillance in education, this analysis reveals how these mechanics influence the ultimate meaning of teaching and learning in Further Education (FE). I use Foucault's analytical tools, archaeology and genealogy, to critique the Framework as a neoliberal form of disciplinary power, particularly the methods used to scrutinise pedagogical operations in FE colleges, and the particular types of knowledge considered beneficial vis-à-vis meeting the regulatory demands of the agency, as well as providing a means for understanding the discourses of standardisation and accountability.

The Ofsted inspection paradigm, I argue, could be viewed as a specific technology of power pertaining to an economic rationality that seeks disciplined institutions that produce disciplined and responsible consumers for a cost–transaction society. My thesis is that the new EIF intensifies the significance of business-like standardisation that fails to adopt a relational perspective in terms of valuing education for the sake of cultivating intellectual participation.

6.2. The 2019 Education Inspection Framework (EIF)

The EIF is the first document since 2015 to outline new guidelines for inspections, and it provides a model for all inspections carried out from September 2019. The policy document introduces a few key changes to the inspection process. These include splitting the personal development and behaviour and attitudes into two separate judgements. The 'quality of teaching, learning and assessment' has been replaced by new 'quality of education' judgement in order to deintensify the inspection focus on performance data (Ofsted 2019a). With regard to quality of education, there are

three parameters by which a provider is able to demonstrate the effectiveness of its operation – 'Intent', 'Implementation' and 'Impact'. These factors are associated with curriculum planning, execution and their outcomes for students, respectively. The Education Inspection Framework is accompanied by the 'Further Education and Skills Handbook' which 'set[s] out how [FE] inspection judgements that inspectors will make and on which they will report'. (Ofsted, 2019b, p. 3).

6.2.1.   Business ethos in the EIF

Although the 2019 EIF does not significantly digress from previous inspection frameworks in terms of its adherence to dominant political discourses which are inextricably bound up with the *businessification* of education, the framework significantly alters the 'truth regime' (Foucault, 2000b, p. 131) of quality in education that existed before this policy was introduced. This framework is quasi-academic, as it provides an overview of research to justify its formulae that reduces colleges with similar features to various distinct categories. The use of research is pivotal in order to understand Ofsted's power to redefine the discourse of quality in teaching and learning spaces. Unlike previous frameworks, the EIF inspectors do not utilise the internal performance data of schools and colleges for current students as evidence during an inspection; instead, inspectors are expected to gather direct evidence on the quality of education (Ofsted, 2019b). This is a substantial shift that can be viewed in relation to Foucault's discussion of disciplinary power, a mechanic which corresponds to the neoliberal ideals of accountability and transparency. Few would dispute the idea that educators and educational institutions should, like anyone else, be accountable for their work. Yet the idea of using market-based accountability is not devoid of problems. These problems have to do with the McDonaldisation of education – a concept discussed in the literature review – which involves examining ways principles of the fast-food chain have influenced the society we live in, and how Ofsted policy could be a response to business needs, based upon the business principles of efficiency, predictability and calculability (Ritzer, 2011).

At present, FE appears to be all about number games, success rates and employability. It is the inclusion of market-based principles - translated from Adam Smith's work - that have hit the ethical foundation of FE and changed the culture of education in Britain. In the light of ongoing cuts to government funding for FE, such strategy involves carrying out a range of tasks on a tight budget in a measurable manner, so success and failure are easy to determine in terms of rewarding and

punishing providers with 'outstanding' and 'inadequate' grades; the labels, some believe, are inevitable parts of being a competitive and productive FE college. Ofsted continues to deploy the discourses of transparency and accountability within market-based parameters such as performance indicators and monitoring systems whereby institutions are expected to self-regulate their operation. It is in this sense that a Foucauldian analysis would describe the inspection process as a 'technique … to direct the conduct of men' [sic] (Foucault, 1982, p. 37). A process in which the localised and varying social needs of the providers in different parts of the country seem to have been overlooked. Foucault's work helps us understand the extraneousness of the universalising accountability process in assessment practices. 'All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence' (Foucault, 1982, p. 10).

This following section employs Michel Foucault's archaeology and genealogy as analytical tools with which to critically examine the political–economic rationality embedded in the EIF and the Handbook.

6.2.2.   Archaeology and genealogy as methods of policy analysis

As noted in the methodology section, Foucault's archaeology involves exploring the historicity of knowledges described in policies, and analysing discursive rules. These rules define the 'real', (1972, p. 96) what may be considered false and what may receive official sanction. The focus of analysis is discourse, as well as practices informed by specific modes of thought— Foucault terms these 'epistemes' (ibid., p. 191). Foucault's turn to genealogy marks a shift from the interpretation of epistemes in their historical context towards the analysis of the historical nexus between knowledge, power and subjectivity. The purpose of this approach is to examine the emergence of new knowledges and power, as well as how they came into being. In other words, genealogy contextualises the development and transformation of theoretical knowledge (savoir) by situating it alongside broader power relations and historical events. In this methodological approach, Foucault rejects the notion of self-evidence outright (Foucault 1984a; 1987).

Drawing on these concepts, in this next section I outline the historical context and political assertions that form the foundation of this framework, and led to the construction of the specific knowledge exemplified in this policy document. It is important to examine the language that underpins the skills

agenda, as such 'discourse' (Foucault, 1972, p. 107) as this constitutes a significant element of an inspection process that places economic rationality at the heart of teaching and learning practices.

6.2.3.   Knowledge formation

Considered through the lens of a Foucauldian theorisation of knowledge as archaeology, the EIF can be analysed as 'the statement' (Foucault, 1972, p. 99) in terms of how its production, distribution and development are one aspect of a broader regime of truth. Since the EIF is the first Ofsted framework that draws on research to justify its inspection judgements, it establishes a powerful matrix of interventions into matters of theory and pedagogy. Nonetheless, the scope of research reviewed by Ofsted is rather limited as it mainly draws on studies 'done in schools and early year settings, rather than in FE'. Secondly, the EIF only utilises evidence that is directly linked to inspection judgement and criteria (Ofsted 2019c, 3). O'Leary was one of the few who called into question the 'legitimacy and currency' of the EIF for FE as it did not engage 'with evidence from FE research' (O'Leary, quoted in Exley 2019). Certainly, providing an overview of research to support inspection judgement is a helpful process. However, the use of partial evidence—a substantial portion of which is not directly linked to FE—suggests that the existing regime of truth serves to develop a specific process while using research to provide evidence that can support its pre-determined judgements.

In this sense, this policy has reinforced its tools of inspection, and for that reason it is significantly different from previous frameworks. However, the focus on the need for colleges to operate as engines for economic productivity means that this document is less effective in terms of its pedagogical orientation than a policy that might offer a more holistic view of potential educational improvements. For example, a comparison with the document 'A Basis for Choice' (ABC), produced by the Further Education Curriculum Review and Development Unit in 1979, enables us to identify the potential for policy frameworks to be more relevant to vocational education to focus exclusively on vocational education as these may generate meaningful conversations about teaching and learning theories. ABC outlined how a different approach to curriculum design and teaching processes, such as discovery methods and experiential learning, could help FE 'integrate a core of general education into vocational education', and achieve a range of social, economic and environmental, as well as political, objectives (James, Biesta et al., 2007, p. 54). Unlike the EIF,

wherein the curriculum intent must be informed by the needs of the market, ABC argued that curriculum content should be linked to student needs, and proposed that non-measurable achievements should also be recorded as forms of assessment (ibid).

It is in this way that examining the EIF as 'the statement' (Foucault 1972, 99) enables the reader to scrutinise *the true* within policy discourse, the rules used in the construction of that truth, and the pedagogical authority attributed to Ofsted through the use of selective research. This archaeological analysis could go even further, suggesting that Ofsted's use of research to support its judgements serves to strengthen its commitment to neoliberalism because the overarching agenda fails to extend beyond employability. This approach is at odds with the one taken in ABC, which incorporated a more holistic perspective of the transformational aspects of pedagogy.

The focus on the way in which the EIF uses research and evidence to support its criteria allows us to question and redescribe 'the true' articulated in this document. As Foucault articulates: '[what] people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed' (Foucault 1988c, p.10) This critique can be facilitated by examining the effects and functions of statements, instead of describing the meaning of a text. The core purpose of FE providers, in Ofsted's view, seems to be embedded within the economy. The key effect of such a policy is that it creates a set of guidelines for FE colleges to follow, thus aligning their function with market trends, rather than prioritising social, moral, ethical and political commitments.

Indeed, Ofsted is just one component of a broader disciplinary mechanism which forces us to think within defined discursive possibilities shaped by neoliberal modes of thought. In that sense, the EIF is but one of the products of a powerful structure of thought which shapes the entire education system. The educational disciplinary dispositif imposes itself onto the discourse of quality produced in the EIF. This underpinning logic allows the knowledge of business to determine approaches to education, thus enabling Ofsted to frame its own intent, as presented in the EIF. Indeed, Ofsted policy adumbrates the idea of education for the sake of employment, bringing its plan of action in line with the contemporary neoliberal discourse that dominates the whole of society. As Foucault highlights: 'practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are

patterns that [are] imposed upon him by his culture, his society and his social group' (1991, p. 11). We need to understand the word individual in the broader sense of 'the body' and view Ofsted as a truth regime operating within the broader apparatus of a neoliberal system of government that seeks to define the conditions of possibility for all areas of human life, including education. The genealogy of the EIF as a programme for controlling institutions through descriptions of outstanding and inadequate practices exemplifies 'the formation of special knowledge, the strengthening of controls', which are often taken for granted. A genealogical approach thus reveals how a regime of power–knowledge operates by altering the meaning of quality in education and re-evaluating how experiences of pedagogy are constructed 'in accordance with [...] major strategies of knowledge and power' (Foucault, 1981b, pp. 105-106).

The current system of governance that creates the truth supporting Ofsted judgements is based on the techniques of disciplinary power and it gains its intellectual legitimacy from dominant political discourses of our time—here, the authoritarian discourse is neoliberalism. Disciplinary power operates by gathering information about individuals and organisations, and subsequently evaluating that information according to its own truth, which is predefined in discourse and which is produced in and distributed through policies. It is the discussion of this issue to which I turn in the next section.

6.2.4.   Disciplinary power and politics of accountability: the 'truth' of placing 'bodies' into categories

As noted previously, disciplinary power redefined the art of governance by influencing public perceptions of 'the rational' and 'the sane'. This form of power needs 'free' bodies that can be governed by establishing certain ideas and practices as sensible. Disciplinary power uses technologies of observation, surveillance, and confession to produce a body that is easy to influence, persuade and control (Foucault, 1998).

During their visits, inspectors reduce college performance vis-à-vis four key criteria (quality of education, behaviour and attitude, personal development, leadership and management) to a fixed phenomenon which can be graded on a scale of one to four. A college with grade 1 is regarded as outstanding, grade 2 is seen as 'good', grade 3 and 4 will be deemed 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate', respectively. The EIF states:

Inspectors will use all the available evidence to evaluate [...] a provider's overall effectiveness, inspectors will consider whether the standard of education, [...] is good or outstanding. If it is not at least good, inspectors will consider whether it requires improvement or is inadequate.

(Ofsted 2019a, p. 9).

The information acquired during inspections is used to assign these labels in reports, a process which can be viewed as the exertion of disciplinary power. The reports construct a 'common sense' through an interpretation (of outstanding or inadequate) constructed upon normalising language. Similarly, Foucault's work reflects a concern with the way in which judgements are valorised as true, as well as the effects of truth in terms of how it is interpreted: '[i]t is always possible one could speak the truth in a void; one would only be in the true, however, if one obeyed the rules of some discursive "police" which would have to be reactivated every time one spoke' (Foucault, 1972, p. 224).

This perspective involves examining the system that supports and controls the policy statements in terms of their production and ordering. In this context, FE colleges are persistently obliged to define their practices according to Ofsted definitions, which can include or exclude them from the status of being in the true. The principles that determine these regulatory judgements are financial and embed Further Education within an increasingly competitive environment established by the instrumentalisation and economisation of education (Avis, 2009b). This apparatus, furthermore, is based on the assumption that ranking institutions will increase the quality of teaching and learning.

As noted in chapter 1, the truth of using a grading system in an educational context is problematic in many ways and even in outstanding provisions, there is always room for improvement (Ball, 2015a). Bourdieu would see such grading systems as 'acts of categorisation; the etymology of the word 'category' from *categorein* means publicly accusing, even insulting' (2014, p. 11). Grading practices have financial and social implications, and the label 'Inadequate' exemplifies how an organisation can be treated with subliminal contempt that does not resolve any problems; in fact, it

leads to more problems by creating further inequality as a result of the financial implications for a college that is graded as inadequate.

Foucault views these acts of categorisation as a *sine qua non* of contemporary systems of government, and argues that observation, examination and normalisation are the key techniques of disciplinary power. Since these are not neutral practices, they work through a norm that helps classify, endorse and exclude individuals: '[n]ormalising judgement serves to create a distinction between "good-bad", "normal-abnormal", operating through rewards as well as punishments' (Foucault quoted in Edwards 2002, p. 361). When inspectors detail the evidence gathered during their visit, the inspection report constitutes a 'truth' that seeks to divide bodies (at individual and organisational levels) into categories. This report then constructs them as particular kinds of subjects: outstanding, good, requires improvement, inadequate, red, amber, green 'and so on. A Foucauldian perspective of these labels reveals that they should no longer be viewed as objective descriptions of reality. Rather, they constitute particular subjectivities (ways of being) that are discursively constituted (created using language) through the exercise of disciplinary power (Ninnes and Burnett, 2003). This is why the EIF is as much a political document, as pedagogical.

Another important issue linked with grading is the use of the economic principles of accountability and transparency, as well as the notion of freedom, which rationalises this style of governance for key stakeholders. Foucault argues that power 'is tolerable only on a condition that it mask[s] the substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanism' (1998, p. 86). The exercise of power in this context is masked by the notions of accountability and transparency. The ethos articulated in educational policies (such as Hinds speech 2018 discussed later in this chapter) and its manifestation in the EIF highlight that accountability and transparency remain within the constraints established by neoliberal political discourse. 'Being transparent in response to a market and being transparent in response to institutional obligations to the public' are two completely different concerns (Jankowski and Provezis 2014, p. 484). Since it is 'the economic rationality approach pushing for transparency' at the centre of the existing political arena, colleges 'will continue to alter their practices and regulate themselves within a discourse which does not honour the social contract and requires them to be reactive to changing accountability demands' (ibid.).

Additionally, such categorisations are linked with the use of business-oriented reductionism in the assessment of educational educational practices. A core assumption of a neoliberal logic, that educational practices are embodiments of Ofsted evaluations, should be problematised, particularly when these pedagogical processes are inherently fluid, incidental, non-linear and taking place in a complex and transversal environment. The use of quality improvement agendas enables the observation and assessment of these practices in terms of their McDonaldised efficiency, calculability and predictability. This approach requires a homogeneity of practices, all communicating one simple message which results in the pronouncement of a regime of disciplinary judgements. In addition, we have seen that an award of 'outstanding' signifies that the college acts in compliance with the most recent inspection framework, which can be quite limiting in its scope. For example, it is bound to punish all forms of non-compliance, even where they may emerge from local and/or contextual requirements.

The next part of this section explores how Ofsted's treatment of all institutions in the same fashion can be understood as a practice of exclusion, wherein it becomes impossible to realise that approaches could vary according to different local contexts.

6.2.5. The genealogy of power-knowledge

The case of Summerhill School is a good example through which to understand an audit culture that overlooks and, at times, outright ignores local contexts. Ofsted inspected the school in 1999 and issued a Notice of Compliance with 'a list of alleged inadequacies' (Stronach 2005, 1). Summerhill appealed against the verdict; the case was heard by a Tribunal in 2000. The school argued that Ofsted did not consider the school's philosophy and values, and incorrectly evaluated their practices according to fixed criteria. Ofsted moreover ignored parents' feedback, which showed 100% approval for the school, and disregarded pupils' views about their learning outside the classroom. Summerhill won the case and 'lodged an official complaint to Ofsted about the quality of its inspection' (ibid, 10). The complaint was upheld based on their own evidence and the findings of an independent inquiry. Ofsted dismissed the complaint, stating that they 'stand by the grades given' (Taylor 2002, p. 4d) quoted in Stronach 2005, 10). It was discovered that the school had been placed on Ofsted's 'to be watched' (TBW) list prior to the inspection.

This case draws attention to two important points. The first is related to the possibility of challenging contemporary common sense through 'critically informed, oppositional micro-politics' and considering 'the power-relations that (quite literally) constitute education, on Foucault's own terms, as being creative, "enabling" and positive' (Leask 2012, 57). Thus, the case of Summerhill School enables consideration of strategies of refusal of and resistance to the proposed subjectivities constructed by authoritative discourses. 'Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are' (Foucault 1982, p. 785). The refusal in this sense constitutes reimagining our own existence and reconstructing a taken- for-granted identity. Summerhill School made its own existence imaginable through an act of radical conduct. This non-compliance highlights the importance of local practices and arrangements that denaturalise any fixed criteria that attempt to use predetermined knowledge to define and assess the performance of any given institution in a particular social milieu. The case undermines Ofsted's tools of knowability and highlights that the modern regulatory apparatus is not as natural and self-evident as it may initially seem.

The second point pertains to the understanding of the gestalt of disciplinary power in relation to the production of knowledge in modern times. We can juxtapose the Summerhill School case with Ofsted's own elaboration of its primary role in the EIF: 'Ofsted exists to be a force for improvement through intelligent, responsible and focussed inspection and regulation [...] The primary purpose of inspection under this framework is to bring about improvement in education provision' (Ofsted 2019a, p. 5). This discourse represents improvement as a desirable objective for all educational organisations. A framework which is based on research should enable colleges to comply with a message that encourages them to formulate strategies to improve their practices and dispositions. The EIF gains its significance because of this discourse of improvement, a narrative which has a specific meaning inscribed alongside the generalisability across educational practices in all settings. It would be hard to dispute the desirability of improvement from a Modernist perspective. Indeed, it is stated that, through the use of 'evidence' and 'research', the 'valid' and 'reliable' judgements focus on 'key strengths, from which other providers can learn intelligently, and areas of weakness, from which the provider should seek to improve. Our inspections act as a trigger to others to take action' (Ofsted, 2019a, pp. 5-6). This form of power is productive rather than oppressive; it produces knowledge and desire. Power in this sense is a strategy that establishes the terms of the relationship

between colleges and Ofsted. The language of improvement and phrases such as 'inspections as a trigger' encourage the bringing of practices in line with the EIF, and failure to do so could result in the evaluation of practices as either 'inadequate' or 'require improvement'. Therefore, this statement establishes a criterion of admissibility for educational practices, and limits for institutional inclusion and exclusion. It is in this sense that technologies of power produce supposedly objective knowledge to subtly subjugate colleges by turning them into objects of knowledge. This controlling form of knowledge is not neutral, as it constitutes the deployment of a particular perspective to classify FE providers and schools. For Foucault, knowledge and power are inseparable:

> Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, becomes true. Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations.

> (Foucault, 1977, p. 27).

In other words, knowledge is a mode of power and is produced through observation practices. Ofsted, as one aspect of a broader disciplinary mechanism, produces power effects by providing standards and guidelines according to which colleges shape their practices, which are then evaluated by inspectors and which define their new subjectivities. Any deviance leads to disciplinary strategies, such as being included in the 'TBW' list or becoming subject to FE commissioners' frequent monitoring visits. It is important to note that conformity, on the other hand, is not achieved through coercion but through the creation of desire. Ofsted has acquired a reputation as a prestigious department of the UK government and the inclusion of research in its new policy has further reinforced that conception. By constructing definitions of 'outstanding' and 'inadequate' practices, Ofsted has endorsed its standards and generated the desire to conform to this new framework. The power to create reality and identify normality as well as deviance creates a pressure to conform to the specifications drawn up for all colleges, regardless of their context.

This approach disadvantages some institutions owing to their demographics, as the 'behaviours and attitudes' of FE learners in a deprived part of London are judged according to the same criteria that are used to assess a grammar school in a prosperous suburb. For example, a college in an economically disadvantaged area, in which the majority of learners are adults with childcare responsibilities, is likely to have different attendance and punctuality figures than a Sixth Form college or an academy with middle-class adolescents. This also places organisations such as Summerhill at a considerable disadvantage due to their distinct aims and teaching practices.

It is worth mentioning that Summerhill School, which is now a private fee-paying school, could only afford to lodge an appeal to the tribunal owing to its considerable financial resources and well educated, wealthy parent group, who fully supported its democratic governance and an unconventionally progressive model of education. A significant majority of institutions would not be in a position would not be in a position to challenge an unfavourable Ofsted judgement even if they were able to provide contrary evidence.

6.2.6.   Technologies of the Self

Ofsted further maintains its authority outside of its inspection process by producing regulations that result in the creation of a desire to achieve an 'outstanding' or 'good' status. The use of observations, audits and standardisation as technologies of power helps classify individuals and organisations into categories, which impacts on how these organisations and individuals perceive themselves and their roles, and adjust their behaviour. Thus, Foucauldian 'Technologies of the Self' become a relevant consideration: colleges engage in self-disciplining through the use of mock inspections, quality reviews and internal observations schemes (Foucault 1998). Furthermore, colleges are compelled to self-regulate their conduct when they discuss their own audit reports, and the extent to which their practices conform to the EIF, in SLT (Senior Leadership Team) meetings. The management in the college are obliged to confess any deviations in their SARs (Self-Assessment Reports), which Ofsted expects each organisation to produce on a yearly basis. 'Inspectors will use [the college] self-assessment reports [...] to assess risk, monitor standards and plan for inspection' (Ofsted 2019b, 26). Self-assessments therefore are a key component in the inspection process as they contribute to the judgements made in the final Ofsted report. Self-assessments can be viewed as a process that

involves making colleges more modern, accountable, effective and transparent while also 'serv[ing] to facilitate the development of a regime of truth' (Avis, 2009b, p. 111). Self-assessment, as a performance management tool, reveals the strategies of improvement and aligns teaching practices with the common sense constructed by the discourse of quality in the EIF.

The Ofsted Framework draws our attention to a subtle apparatus of biopower which functions on a micro-level by determining and manipulating the desire to achieve the perfection which accompanies an 'outstanding' evaluation. This discourse of quality strengthens the EIF, as it establishes a desirable academic character and reinforces its dominance by providing an overview of research. It extends the neoliberal conception of 'responsibilisation' (Rose and Miller, 2008, p. 205) by installing an ideology of institutional responsibility and irresponsibility, providing generic expectations that the colleges must now strive to fulfil, and emphasising institutional obligations to maintain 'outstanding' practices through self-regulation.

The type of institutional reflection encouraged through SAR exemplifies a technology of the self, and serves to shape organisational operations according to a rationality based on consumerism which and the kinds of knowledge that does not focus on factors emanating from local social relations. As Avis highlights:

> The concern is to enhance performance without engaging in a critique or in reflection around the social relations in which work is placed. It is through this silence that the quality debate becomes appropriated by a conservative logic [...] quality represents a particular manifestation of the new managerialism in education.

> (Avis 1996, p. 109).

The EIF contributes to the efforts of Ofsted to cultivate a reputation as a fair and transparent body, as reflected in the internalisation of the discourse articulated in local Quality Improvement Action Plans (QIAPs) and SARs at the college level (Beighton, 2012). Foucault (1977) reminds us that knowledge is never neutral, as it dictates power relations. In this sense, knowledge manufactures the definitions of normality in order to produce the type of FE colleges that are economically viable

and meet the needs of the market. Self-disciplining is nurtured through a range of technologies of surveillance deployed by the colleges themselves. The gaze of power is internalised and critiques internal documentation and quality interventions that mirror the EIF guidelines. In this sense, the EIF buttresses neoliberalist individualism, and places responsibility on colleges to improve their grades. A grade 3 or 4 would mean that a particular college is not sufficiently dedicated. As noted above, this regime of truth and objectivity simply exposes colleges to their local conditions and diverts attention away from the range of social, economic and political challenges a college may be facing at a particular point in time. The expectation is that all colleges must embody the Ofsted pedagogical ideal that is driven by a skills shortage in the market, rather than particular skills needed in specific occupations (Avis 2009b). This is crucial: here, the construction of 'common-sense' is defined by finance. This priority is clearly communicated, and policy makers make no apologies for it.

6.2.7.   Quality of education: the underlying rationale

For Foucault, each 'educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and power it carries with it' ([1971] 1996a, p. 351). Thus, educational institutions are primarily concerned with the construction of knowledge, who defines knowledge, how knowledge should be understood, and what counts as knowledge and what does not. The appropriation of common sense in FE is informed by neoliberal business conceptions which leads to the emergence of new discourses within teaching and learning spaces.

Almost a year before the EIF was introduced, Damian Hinds, the then Education Secretary, blamed lack of productivity for the state of the UK economy and outlined implications for public services in a speech at Battersea Power Station. Hinds stated:

> We can't guarantee young people that a qualification is a clear path to a job unless
> we're working side by side with the people who have the vacancies, and the skills
> needs. That's why we're putting employers at the heart of every reform we're
> making to technical education.

(Hinds, 2018)

This statement needs to be read in conjunction with the guidelines about skills and employability agendas in education elaborated in the EIF. One reason that Foucault's conception of discourse is invaluable for a political analyses of education policy discourses such as this is that it explores the underlying process rather than merely dealing with the dimensions of the product. In other words, looking at how an argument in a policy discourse that is likely to be perceived more 'valid' came into existence and evolved takes precedence over the linguistic description of the merits or demerits of such policies. Attempting to examine 'what was silently articulated beyond the text' of this speech has priority over uncovering its intended meaning (Foucault 1981, 58). Indeed, articulating the origins and development of the logic embedded within the EIF helps us determine its genealogy, and reveals the obscured technologies of power–knowledge crucial to its dominance (Foucault, 1977). For example, the overt linkage of Further Education to employability and employability skills functions to overshadow the significance of abstract knowledge as well as core education values such as intellectual independence, imagination and selflessness (Olssen et al, 2004). A genealogical method enables the examination of how the emergence of the EIF is linked with the financial sector.

Another underlying meaning may well operate in an apparent assumption about FE students' intellectual calibre. It may be assumed that if there is a problem with the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, it can be solved by shifting the focus from powerful emancipatory knowledge to providing skills the labour market needs rather than thinking of different ways of solving the problem – the ways of enabling FE students to obtain and use abstract and theoretical knowledge or making connections between technical and academic knowledge. 'Theoretical knowledge is perceived as alien and difficult, and associated with the disengagement of "vocational" students from formal education. In England, this problem has historically been addressed by avoiding or reducing the amount of theoretical knowledge taught, rather than finding alternative ways to make it accessible' (Bathmaker, 2013, p. 92. Also see Atkins, 2009; Bates, 1998; Ecclestone, 2002).

Hinds' solution to the productivity gap included changing the direction of the education system, as contemporary vocational and technical education was not significantly connected with skilled employment. Furthermore, Hinds stressed that the delivery of a 'modern industrial strategy' and

moving people into technical jobs is the 'core purpose' of Further Education colleges (Hinds 2018). Employers are the key stakeholders in this process. From a neoliberal perspective, this appears to be a rational argument that is also in line with vocational trends in some other countries. For example, a move towards a competency-based curriculum in Australia has organised curriculum goals and purposes according to the demands of the job market (Wheelahan et al, 2015).

In this context, it could be argued that the EIF seeks to promote an institutional culture' whereby the vision for the purpose and value of education will be judged upon by its capacity in relation to the combination of labour and capital leading to economic productivity; something Damian Hinds had suggested in his Battersea speech. In this context, it is not a coincidence that the FE sector is used to promote the interest of the market state, hence an arena wherein neoliberalism in education can be seen at its best. For example, FE learners are less likely to have access to 'powerful knowledge' and the 'service providers' are not funded to deliver it. The inclusion of powerful knowledge can be made possible by adding value to vocational curricula which requires a commitment to teaching subjects such as history, politics and philosophy. It is in this sense that teaching in FE 'is increasingly impoverished and utilitarian' and the whole sector is 'positioned firmly at the lower end of the institutional hierarchy' (Simmons and Thompson, 2008 in Simmons, 2010). This is precisely why the idea of FE as an option for learners to move on to a higher level of qualification, I would argue, is not devoid of limitations and constraints that restrict the effectiveness of level 2 and 3 courses offered by the sector.

6.2.8.   Neoliberal meaning in the description of knowledge and skills

The Ofsted criteria for judging the quality of teaching, learning and assessment centralises teaching practices that develop learners' employability skills and deliver learning that meets business needs. Phrases such as 'employers' needs', 'asset to the business', 'skills', 'industries and training' are some of the keywords in the grade descriptors explained in the document (see Ofsted 2019a; 2019b). While the policy also refers to developing learners' 'knowledge', the crucial focus is that the aforementioned commercial vocabulary redefines knowledge as competences that can be continuously adapted to meet the needs of the market (Olssen, 2006). The notion of skill has long been a crucial factor in FE policy making (Gleeson, 1990; Green, 1998; Hodgson and Spours, 2008; Bathmaker, 2013), however, in the 2019 EIF—along with skills and employment—the word 'knowledge' is ubiquitously

mentioned throughout the 'quality of education' section. For example, it is stated that curricula and teaching should enable learners 'to build and secure knowledge, skills and behaviour' or 'should provide knowledge for the future' (Ofsted, 2019b, pp. 39-40).

The question is, as Bathmaker points out, '[w]hat is meant by "knowledge" in vocational education qualifications and who decides?' (2013, p. 87). As seen in the previous section, vocational education involves providing a second chance to learners who were failed by schools or sixth forms; therefore, 'knowledge' essentially relates to work readiness or progression to Higher Education. The neoliberal version of knowledge entails preparing learners for roles required by the economy.

In Foucault's genealogy, the denotative meaning of 'knowledge' is not as significant as its political origins and implications. Definitions in the true are informed by what is prohibited, allowed and promoted by institutions, while also adhering to the requirements of the definition of such knowledge. In Foucault's work, the phrase 'in the true' is linked to a process by which each discursive field distinguishes between true or false statements and power effects are attached to what counts as true (Foucault in Rainbow 1991). In the above example, therefore, the actual discussion on what constitutes knowledge is not as important as the analysis of rules that dictate the discussion; in other words, 'how it becomes possible to say (or know) certain things?' (Bacchi and Bonham, 2014, p. 180) For Foucault, '"rules" are *sets of relationships*, "a complex group of relations that *function as a rule*' [emphasis in original] (Foucault quoted in Bacchi and Bonham, 2014, p. 180). In this context, these relationships can be established through a juxtaposition of Hinds' speech in 2018 and the introduction of the EIF in 2019.

Here, the 'rules' indicate that developing students' knowledge means making them ready for employment. This is quite evident in this new policy, wherein the word 'knowledge' is—by all appearances—synonymous with the word 'skills'. For example, the criterion in the Handbook directs colleges to use assessments that enable learners to 'embed and use knowledge fluently and show that they are competent in their application of skills' (Ofsted, 2019a, p. 40). However, at times, the document does refer to skills without even alluding to knowledge: 'Inspectors […] will focus on what learners have learned, and the skills they have gained and can apply' (ibid., p. 41).

Ofsted's description of how the 'quality of education' will be judged, through 'Intent', 'Implementation' and 'Impact' is imbued with a familiar 'skills' mantra. It would appear that the only appropriate definition of knowledge and skills is one that is work-related. In the grade descriptors for 'quality of education', a college would be considered 'outstanding' if its curriculum is 'planned and sequenced towards *cumulatively sufficient knowledge and skills for* future learning and *employment*', and it would be deemed 'good' if its curriculum is 'ambitious [and] appropriately *relevant to local and regional employment and training priorities*' [emphasis added] (Ofsted, 2019a, p. 43).

Central to this emphasis on skills and knowledge is the idea of promoting and improving basic employability skills. This description is accompanied by a total neglect of the importance of theoretical and abstract knowledge, which are in fact examples of 'powerful' knowledge. As Young highlights: '[p]owerful knowledge provides more reliable explanations and new ways of thinking about the world and acquiring it and can provide learners with a language for engaging in political, moral and other kinds of debates' (Young, 2008, p. 14). Although vocational knowledge ought to help learners acquire job-related skills, it should not be the sole aim of education at the forefront of curricula (ibid). Education policymaking is a significantly political matter, and its analysis is no longer confined to groups such as statisticians and government officials. Contemporary policy analysis considers social contexts and structures and their links to historical context, as well as contemporary political rhetoric (Olssen et al, 2004). In Ofsted's view, if 'the provider's curriculum intent is strong', it will contribute to an outstanding 'quality of education' grade (2019a, p. 43). The definition of 'strong', here, is not clear, however since the Inspection Framework in its contemporary form is fixated upon employability, it would be reasonable to assume that the quality of education is reduced to embedding work-related knowledge within the application of skills that can be measured and reported.

Combining individuals' self-interest with what strengthens the economy is a process which, as Olssen et al point out, 'involves the importation into education of instrumentalist values, grounded on such motives as the self-interest of the individual and concepts such as [...] opportunism and bounded rationality or rent-seeking behaviour' (2004, p. 192). It is one of the strategies that work to create 'self-serving' and 'competitive' learners that are 'likely to be dishonest' and create

McDonaldised institutions that are efficient and controlled rather than structured on the basis of veracity and 'interpersonal trust' (ibid). In other words, the McDonaldisation of education defines an institutional culture whereby the vision of the purpose and value of education will be judged upon its capacity to combine labour and capital and increase economic productivity, an objective suggested by Damian Hinds in his Battersea speech.

Behaviour acquisition in the EIF

According to the new EIF, the evidence of strong 'intent for the curriculum' is based on how a course's content helps learners '*acquire* knowledge, skills and *behaviours*' and 'how learners see links between different areas of knowledge and skills and recognise that some *knowledge and skills are transferable*' [emphasis added] (Ofsted, 2019b, pp. 39-40). The notions of behaviour acquisition and transferable skills in this context are problematic. The point is that while there is nothing inherently wrong in this expectation of colleges teaching desirable behaviour and students acquiring and exhibiting such skills, it does not sufficiently embrace the issues around social factors such as class and ethnicity and the role they play in shaping behaviours.

The EIF (Ofsted, 2019b, pp. 46-47) states that:

> '[I]nspectors will use evidence gathered during the inspection as well as evidence of trends in learners' behaviour and attitude ... to learning, and 'to work, and the development of skills relevant to their learning programme. Inspectors' judgements also take account of learners' ability to demonstrate appropriate behaviour for the learning and the work environments. Behaviour and attitude would be judged outstanding if learners are committed in terms of their 'high participation in skills competition'; they demonstrate 'consistently high levels of respect' and 'positive attitudes...to their education'

> (Ofsted, 2019b, pp. 46-47)

This suggests that people are free to choose and change their behavioural trajectories and their ability to make these 'rational' decisions should be informed by policies and practise of the FE

institution they are studying in., Zukas notes that the generation of 'reasonable' and 'common sense' behaviours will depend on people encountering situations that are more in line with their life experiences (2013, p. 210). At the time of recording evidence of student behaviour during an inspection, if that particular situation and Ofsted expectations are in line with a learner's traits and tendencies, shaped by their past experience, the behaviour is likely to be endorsed an inspector (ibid.).

The fact is that in 2015, 82% of selective schools were rated outstanding 'compared to just over 20% of all state schools. 99% of selective schools received the top two ratings compared to 88% of all schools' (Fullfact.org, 2016). It is therefore 'pupil intake rather than the quality of school that really derives Ofsted ratings' (Roberts, 2018, p. 15).

The traditional clientele of FE colleges come from working class families and ethnic minorities, especially in areas such as London. Overall, 43% of young and 53% of adult females studying at FE colleges come from ethnic minority backgrounds (AoC: College Key Facts, 2018-2019). Based on this, what are the implications for an FE college, with a large number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, going through an Ofsted inspection? The criteria set to inspect all schools and colleges in this policy may itself be a barrier for an FE college to getting a good grade. For example, the diversity in FE learners' backgrounds could be reflected in their diverse dispositions and behaviours which may or may not be rewarded in relation to the behaviours of pupils in schools and academies situated in an affluent area. This is an example of how students' habitus and cultural capital can influence the college grade. Another crucial factor can be a shift in policy which may 'change field conditions so significantly that "common-sense" provided by circumstances generated under conditions that no longer apply, cannot generate appropriate behaviours' and consequently they may not be able to 'claim preferable field positions, such as, for example, desirable jobs' (Hardy, 2008 in Clark and Zukas, 2013, p. 216).

Ofsted has its own regime of 'truth' translated into the observation mechanism which requires particular dispositions from learners, which enables it to distinguish 'positive' and 'negative' behaviour – a disciplinary technique mentioned earlier in relation to Foucault's work. Nevertheless, FE learners may not possess the dispositions that are displayed by middle class learners in a selective

school or a sixth form college. Their early experiences stemming from social and economic inequalities may result in the generation of behaviour patterns which are different from what inspectors are looking out for. This 'discursive distribution of disadvantage, therefore, frequently falls out along lines of class, gender, ethnicity and other large-scale social categories' (MacLure, 2003, p. 177). Consequently, a full inspection may lead to a college getting a poor grade because it does not have learners with the type of behaviour and attitude Ofsted are looking for.

Employability and transferable skills

The themes of 'employment' and 'transferable skills and knowledge' run through the new policy document. Also of crucial importance in the policy is the attainment of 'qualifications, skills and behaviours that enable students to find employment. The onus is on a college to ensure that learners recognise that their skills are transferable so they can choose destinations that match their aspirations' (Ofsted, 2019b, pp. 40-45). This account of employability tends to ignore the importance of social status and connections which can be an important aspect of employability. An individual's network-based connections and their capability of utilising them as a member of a particular group play a crucial role in increasing or decreasing the likelihood of finding employment.

Traditional conceptions of employability with an underlying ascription of employment to merely knowledge and skills are in line with neoliberal notions of individual choice, professional expertise and skills development. In relation to neoliberal principles, it would appear that Ofsted's understanding of 'skill' is based on notions of generic and transferable skills that can be learned, practised and deployed if the 'quality of education' in a college is good or outstanding. It is made clear in the Framework guidance. 'Learners see links between different areas of knowledge and skills and recognise that some knowledge and skills are transferable' (Ofsted, 2019b, p. 40). The notion of transferable skills is problematic because learners are expected to develop them in their college on their programme of study. This expectation completely disregards the issues the issues of cultural capital and social class. As Ainley puts it:

> [transferable skills] are neither ... transferable, nor skills; they are social and generic
>
> competences ... To present attitudes and habits detached from their cultural context
>
> as technical abilities that can be acquired piecemeal in performance not only

divorces them from cultural context that gave them their original meaning but represents them as equally accessible to all students whatever their class cultural background, gender or race. It ignores the fact that middle-class students already possess many of these competences as a result of their previous education and family socialisation ... For at rock bottom the real 'personal' and 'transferable' skills required for preferential employment are those of whiteness, maleness, and traditional middle-classness. These are the really generic social competences that are most acceptable to most employers.

(Ainley, 1994, p. 80).

The acquisition of personal and transferable skills is seen as a technical rather than a social phenomenon (Avis, 1996). The assumption that educational processes alone would enable the development of these competences used to administer the deficit of skills within the market necessitates a market-driven approach to be adopted for inspections. The approach, which appears to be based on transparency and teacher accountability, places unrealistic demands on colleges and curriculum managers to resolve the matters that may be beyond their control. Therefore, the criteria used to grade colleges overlooks FE learners' economic background and socialised tendencies that direct their behavioural trajectories as well as social processes that determine their abilities to expand the required skills over time.

The employability agenda based on this understanding may seem unsophisticated as it overlooks the magnitude of factors such as 'class, ethnicity and gender both generally and in relation to different kinds of work' (Clarke and Zukas, 2013, p. 210). In Clarke and Zukas' (2013, p. 216) study, one participant, despite having essential skills, struggled to transfer them fully in the application of additional skills responsibilities attached to the job. They described themselves as a 'nerd' or a 'geek' who had trouble adjusting in a 'competitive, results focused, organisational culture' which required frequent interactions with customers. What it means in this context is that that aspects such early experiences can play a key role in the formation of habitus and the type of capital at someone's disposal. As MacLure notes, 'it is abundantly clear from decades of research into family literacy practices that children from white, middle class homes are likely to have extensive experience of the kinds of discourses that are favoured in education long before they get to school' (2003, p. 176).

These discourses and practices play a pivotal role in the acquisition and deployment of knowledge, skills and behaviour.

Trying to understand skills development leading to employability without considering these context-bound and situation specific issues in the fields only 'highlights the significant limitations of conceptions of employability embedded in current policy discourse' (ibid, p. 217). The notion of developing and possessing transferable skills needs to be reconsidered, in education policy agendas, in terms of social and economic factors such as class, gender and ethnicity. However, it may take a fair amount of time and money to follow and measure the effectiveness of colleges' labyrinthine progression outcomes in terms of learner destinations. Looking at the current climate of cuts and corporate priorities, this is something that doesn't seem to be materialising soon, especially when it is likely to weaken the mechanisms of accountability and control and redefine the parameters of inspectors' jurisdictional decisions.

6.3. Conclusion

Foucault's analysis of the workings of disciplinary power is particularly useful for interrogating institutionalised 'common-sense' that produces binary oppositions such as 'outstanding' and 'inadequate' - the labels that contribute to the distribution of new inequalities. Each discourse has its own language and 'general politics of truth' hence the language used in policies is never neutral or transparent. These discourses sanction certain behaviours and disapprove others by controlling and influencing 'what can be said' and what practices count the most. Discourses are never neutral because they are 'exclusionary: they *rule out* other ways of thinking, talking and acting [emphasis in original] (Maclure, 2003, p. 178)

The laissez-faire attitude to power relationships and insufficient focus on connections between education and context-specific social and economic factors in the EIF may mean that it could strengthen and, in some cases, where a substandard grade has financial implications, could distribute further inequalities. A poor grade, paradoxically, may well be a product of the same criteria against which educational practices are judged in the first place. This needs to be explored further – by drawing attention to other ways of reading this policy and looking at a range of possibilities for researching and discussing the intellectual ironies and paradoxes in this key document.

This policy is constituted on certain assumptions about the nature of teaching practices and is premised upon neoliberal beliefs which conjecture sameness in terms of universal categories as well as individual and organisational potential to move in and out of those categories. Such a view opens up the possibilities of analysis in a wide range of ways with respect to curricula and the processes through which teaching practices are organised and then affected by the environment. The neoliberal model of education policy could fundamentally shape pedagogical traditions in teaching and learning spaces in and outside the classrooms. It is a discussion of these issues that I turn to in the next chapter and explore the implications of neoliberalism for teaching practices, paying particular attention to observation practices in relation to quality improvement agendas.

7. Data analysis 2

7.1. Neoliberalism in the interpretation of policies and practices at Northlands

"I want to try to discover how this choice of truth inside which we are caught but which we ceaselessly renew, was made – but also how it was repeated, renewed and displaced"

(Foucault, 1981a, p. 70)

In our modern society it is the state that constructs and imposes education policies and defines conditions for their delivery. The way educational operation is organised in Britain is a good representation of the constitution of a neoliberal order. From the structural reforms of the Washington Consensus to the existing instrumentalist logic stemmed from economic rationality, it is possible to locate similarities in changes that have taken place over time. And on this basis one could understand why things function the way they are made to function. For example, despite the reformed neoliberalism of New Labour and Neo Conservatives, which justifies spending on education in economic terms, FE colleges still face substantial cuts in their budgets. Reading neoliberalism through the lens of Foucauldianism offers valuable insights into the 'art of government' by drawing our attention to the interplay between freedom and precarity (Foucault, 2008). I shall go on to show this in relation to the teaching practices at Northlands. I would like to discuss the analysis of the effects of contemporary discourses of neoliberalism which constantly keep FE in a dangerously volatile state with no apparent compromises on freedom. And then put a question out there; May things be different to how they are generally understood?

7.1.1. Practices defined by precariousness

Foucault (2008, p. 147) claims that 'enterprise society' is developed by creating 'a culture of danger' (ibid, p. 66) imbued with unpredictability at personal and institutional level in today's capitalistic society. 'The constant necessity to adjust to unpredictable and rapidly changing circumstances

underpins the normalisation of behaviour. Under such a state of affairs, precarity performs the role of central regulatory mechanism in society, for by "perpetuating a mobilizing uncertainty" (Lazzarato, 2009, p. 119 in Masquelier, 2019, p. 138). This requires individuals to live as entrepreneurs who are willing to embrace change and self-adjust their rationalities based on risks attached to financial management measures. A practical example of this is found in Gloria's historical account of the changes that took place at Northlands College over the last few years and how they have affected her confidence in difficult times.

> I don't even think it's the change, it's the level of change. How quick it happened [clicking fingers]. We had so many things happen so close together that I don't think any of us recovered from one shock after the other. Principal is leaving, college is merging, demerging, been sold off, redundancies. Within a space of 5 years, it was like boom boom boom boom boom. And I think if you work in an institution like that, it definitely affects your morale because then every year you are getting a new implementation code of 'okay, chop chop; this is what we really wanna do now'.

In order to address Gloria's argument about morale, it is necessary to refer back to the culture of danger mentioned above. If the state can no longer guarantee the stability of its institution and the job security of senior leaders, the phenomenon of teachers being in fear of their job security would seem inevitable. Here this can be seen as a 'technology of power' which prepares the ground for orchestrating 'technologies of self'. In other words, after going through many restructurings, living in dread of redundancy and witnessing an unending cycle of changes at higher level, teaching staff are likely to expect conditions that are even worse than their managers'. The disciplinary strategy of making constant changes in policies and expectations aims to condition behaviours and produce particular conducts. Gloria's description of the changing expectations in 'this is what we *really* wanna do *now*' shows that she is still unsure of the existing discursive truth or what the new regime of truth is going to bring. Or perhaps it is 'uncertainty' per se that is the new 'truth' which everyone is expected to live with.

Deborah expressed a similar view:

> Yes constant lack of stability in the place where I work .. that causes stress and by lack of stability I mean lack of stability within the FE sector ... in a place where tutors are quite undervalued and underpaid and financially, financial stability, stability of an organisation, hitting targets that they are supposed to be hitting, change of management, change of expectations so these are things.

She goes on to say:

> the management in our [college] changes constantly and sets various different goalposts... has been very difficult to catch up with

It is important to note that expectations change constantly when the new management takes charge. Gloria reiterated her previous point:

> We go to these meetings, we listen to the promises, we do their training schemes and then all of a sudden they've gone, someone else comes in and decides ah I pick up where they left off, oh no scrap that, we do everything differently, again.

Gloria and Deborah's stress can be explained by the 'permanent fear of failure' (Lemke, 2012, p. 49) that comes with the neoliberal view of how organisations ought to operate. It is the environment of risk, responsibility and control that shapes teachers' understanding of their roles, which although is at odds with neoliberal management, results in constant fear. There is no ethical basis in this neoliberal 'art of governing'. Precarity in this context is linked with reciprocity of cost and services. The underlying implication in ongoing restructurings is linked to finances. This changes the meaning of working as a teacher at the college since they have to worry about the performance indicators that are not directly linked to their teaching responsibilities. These indicators include student recruitment, implications of mergers and demergers, change in senior management, change in the courses they teach or loss of courses because they cannot be sustained in economic terms, change in college finances and the impact on their livelihood and changes in Ofsted and the Quality department's expectations, described as 'changing goalposts' by Deborah. It goes without saying that economy is important. However, some of these things that initially take the college to a precarious

situation and cause an economic downturn are a direct result of needless decisions taken by senior leaders and are in line with the government policy at the time (please see chapter 1 for details on how colleges were 'forced' to borrow in order to pay for 50% of each funded project). Through no fault of their own, teachers become concerned about their futures and the changes in their job role. Such courses of action are the logical outcome of a neoliberal college.

Despite not being happy with the situation, Gloria still prefers the job she is in as an 'autonomous chooser'. The relationship between 'freedom' and 'precarity' becomes clearer:

> They really don't care, really don't care and you know ask me what I am still doing in this profession? I honestly don't know because I know if I leave this job, there are worse jobs in FE. Zero hours contract and all these kinds of nonsense. I am probably on one of the old-school contracts that's still good.

This shows that there are fields of opportunities and possibilities available to her, but it is her decision not to go for those options and stay put. This sense of Uberised freedom makes the working of power in this fashion possible as '... power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are "free"' (Foucault, 1982). The system gets her to act in accordance with the interests of policy makers by making her embrace the changes, perform her duties and think that she is still better off in her current position. Gloria thinks she is able to use the situation to her own advantage by doing so. It seems that both parties are content with the relationship in this respect. 'The neoliberal art of government's success, therefore, lies in its capacity to compel the individual to become an "entrepreneur of himself", by adopting the form of conduct though to be most appropriate for the various challenges posed by the "dynamics of competition" (Foucault in Masquelier, 2019, p. 137).

One could, however, question the success of this mechanism in terms of its ability to generate new subjectivities defined by entrepreneurialism when teachers think that the changes stem from business needs rather than from the goodwill of the highest echelons of the system. This is evident in Gloria's 'don't care' sentence whereby the indication that policy makers 'don't care' about

individuals' self-interest and wellbeing shows that the relationship is only working because of the mutual material interests rather than resting upon loyalty, commitment or sense of duty.

Luke was equally unconvinced about any pedagogical merits behind the everchanging arrangements in the organisation. When I asked him about his view on why things change so rapidly, he said:

> It's a business ... It's no longer about educating people. It's about perception, it's about giving the perception that what is going on behind the doors is outstanding... it's about making sure that the corporate side are without blame and it's about... it's a money game. Many people within senior management, if they weren't in senior management here, they'd be running an NHS trust, or they'd be running some kind of council office. It's a management role and so the way it's changed is we've moved away from education just for education's sake and for the betterment of the individual to proving or to giving the perception that that's what we are about, but when we are really what we are about is just making sure that we tick the boxes. Doesn't really matter about the individual achievement or the individual or the individual pastoral care that we offer or anything like that, that's of no value to a corporation. Corporation is about profit. It's about profitability and sustainability. And you are only sustainable with bums on seats and achievements and making sure that you give the perception to Ofsted that you are not about that. That you are about education. It comes all through senior management, I think. The way it's changed to become a corporation.

These points highlight that educational policy archaeological outcomes are determined by market-based agendas whereby managerial practices are generated by the utilitarian interplay between business needs and immediate material conditions such as altering the perception of reality. It is in this sense that practices in the college have changed and are premised upon control, accountability and economic growth rather than social and educational needs. In other words, it is a business under the guise of education, fear under the guise of precarity and occupational insecurity under the guise of flexibility. Here the operation in the college is as business driven as in any factory and the teachers face the similar risks experienced by industry workers. Neoliberalism as an 'advanced technology' and as an 'authoritarian discourse of state management' shapes educational practices by measuring the cost of and placing a value on all forms of organisational activity (Olssen, et al, 2004, p. 172).

Luke's account highlights a huge gap between teachers' position and the actions of the senior management. From the teachers' perspective, there's a lack of purpose and a missing sense of trust which involves giving a perception of being good or outstanding and operating as a corporation whilst having little pedagogical rationality as an educational body. On the other hand, senior managers' decisions are seemingly based on economic reasoning which guides an efficient allocation of resources and how they are to be utilised. What seems to be at stake here is the core purpose which has traditionally defined how educational institutions should be designed and made to operate. The assertion that we 'have moved away from education' which was 'for the betterment of the individual' depicts priorities that are driven by consumer demands instead of social needs. What does it look like in practice? Growing disparity between the salaries of senior executives and the front-line staff is one the defining features of business corporations.

7.1.2.   The effects of re-professionalisation: organisational structure and practices

Northlands College is now (in early 2020) part of The Group of Six (G04); a group that has four colleges, two training providers and around 1500 staff spread across 17 locations. After informing staff that there will be no pay rise this year, the CEO of G06 decided to hold a number of staff meetings to discuss college values as well as how the college values its staff members.

The CEO has a reputation for open-mindedness and is thought to be invariably courteous and soft-spoken. However, within 8 months of taking charge of Northlands College, the CEO had sacked both the principal and the vice principal of the college for being in breach of some kind of an informal agreement with G04 vis-à-vis the roles and responsibilities of everyone who works for G04. So, the silver-tongued charmer managed to win people around not just because he is polite and considerate in manner but also because he takes a principled stand against all conflicts by behaving in an honest and moral way. He has successfully established that he can take a tough line on certain things with regards to the rules concerning behaviour that is constantly obeyed and observed.

The CEO is reported to have taken a £227000 salary in 2016/17, £33000 in pension contributions and £21000 from benefits in kind according to the group's most recent accounts. This is approximately nine times more than what an average full-time teacher earns. The University and

College Union's letter to its members about their proposed strike stated that 'even in colleges that have agreed to all the AOC's (Association of Colleges) recommended pay increases since 2009, staff are now 27.4 per cent worse off than they were in 2009 when compared to inflation'. (FE Week, May 2018). This obviously began long before the most recent merger and before the new CEO took office. The staff at Northlands college had not received any pay increments for a decade and the following year was not going to be any different either.

- How can the senior management justify their lucrative salaries while paying lip service to valuing the staff members?

This was the crux of the question Charlotte asked to the CEO in one of the meetings, but did not seem to be satisfied with the answer she was given. Perhaps she thought that the answer was an attempt to deflect attention away from her argument, therefore she kept going back to her original point. However, this did not last long as the CEO told her that she was late so had missed the power point slides and was taking too much time. Charlotte was not willing to give up so tried to continue, but her efforts to emphasise the significance of the pay gap between frontline staff and the senior management were in vain.

7.2. The efficacy of the quality improvement agendas

7.2.1. Teachers' professional development, autonomy and accountability

I decided to meet and interview Charlotte. The following week, she agreed to meet me in one of the empty classrooms after finishing her teaching. She was generally concerned about the efficacy of quality improvement measures taken by the G06 and it seemed that she harboured suspicion of their policies. As I mentioned in the literature review, quality improvement plans can be seen in line with neoliberal reason and as a disciplinary technique aimed at improving accountability and economic efficiency and performativity. As O'Leary states that observation practices have been 'principally concerned with attempting to measure teacher performance for accountability and benchmarking purposes rather than actually improving it' (O'Leary, 2015, p. 73). Charlotte puts it in the following way:

> They want to drive up teaching standards with a set of targets like a business, so you could have your outcomes here and ask your teachers to perform, then you can tick all the criteria they meet.

In response to my question about the consequences of not meeting the criteria she said that teachers can be asked to retrain by going through a mentoring process and 'if you don't come up with the markers then your job is in question, you might get asked to leave' This is the reason teachers actually see the observation process as punitive rather than developmental. The Department for Education's White Paper for schools in 2010 committed to doing more observations 'to root out under-performing teachers'. The same paper argues for more powers for head teachers to do this. Observations are linked to capability procedures which empower senior leaders of educational organisations to get rid of staff with compliance issues.

O'Leary's (2015) discussion on 'disciplinary mechanism' in this context involves providing accountability by beating teachers with a surveillance stick. This highly prescriptive system of accountability uses observation as a tool to hold teachers accountable for what they do in classrooms in relation to the reasons they provide for it in their lesson plans and the degree to which their planning matches with the delivery.

I asked Simon Robertson, the principal of Northlands College, about these growing concerns over quality mechanisms making teaching responsive to hierarchical controls rather then used to improve teaching standards. He was unequivocal in his admiration of the existing system and said using observations and audits as tools of accountability as well as to improve teaching standards was paramount.

> I think accountability has to be there as well as the development. Teachers often feel that classroom is their personal space ... I understand all those things having been a teacher myself but I equally believe that if you want to improve your practices, you've got to allow people to come into your classroom. You've got to allow a bit of measurement not to the extreme but equally if you are an amazing teacher, you should be willing to share that practice with others as well.

Here he makes two points about the importance of observations in relation to improving teaching and learning: 1) Improvement will take place when others can see classroom practices and give feedback, 2) That 'amazing' teachers need to showcase their good practice. By measurement, he seemingly refers to teacher effectiveness and how this system is used to identify exemplary practices and evaluate areas for development. The principal's argument is in alignment with Michael Gove's pronouncement that 'teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman. Watching others, and being rigorously observed yourself as you develop, is the best route to acquiring mastery in the classroom' (Gove, 2010). These ideas find expression in teaching and learning policies as the TLA policy at Northlands College states "As the focus of observation is improvement, all staff offered coaching will have someone allocated to support them with their action plan. This could be an Improvement Practitioner, Curriculum Mentor, Curriculum Manager or other suitably qualified member of staff. A package of support will be negotiated and may include one to one meetings, supported planning, team teaching, peer observations, specific CPD and supported reflection" (Teaching, Learning and Assessment Procedure Northlands, September 2019).

Cohen and Goldhaber (2016) argue that observation of teaching practices allows for effective feedback on live teaching. This is not possible in other suggested models for teacher education programmes such as 'Unseen Observations' (See O'Leary, 2014). On the other hand, the identification of good teaching practices will pave the way for sharing that practice through peer observations and giving other opportunities to benefit from that. Both of Simon's points are linked to 'performance enhancement' rather than observations used as part of the 'performance management' agenda (O'Leary and Savage, 2019, p. 3). This approach highlights the importance of observations used as means of improving individual performance in the classroom as well as learning from peers. Nonetheless, this is not how some teachers see it, or at least it's not these aspects per se they take issue with. Their main concern about observations is associated with the judgemental nature of these practices and the focus on accountability. The principal did not deny this. He elaborated on how observations are important and fulfil the needs of accountability in relation to learner needs.

Accountability has to be there I believe from a consistency point of view and a fairness point of view in my opinion. Fairness is very important. You will know – we have all worked as part of the teams where one teacher is not pulling their weight and everybody feels really demotivated but they can't do anything about it ... and the other reason why I think accountability measures need to be there not just for teachers for everybody in the organisation is because lots of parents, guardians place a lot of trust in us as an establishment. You know no one would let you or me to teach their kids or take them to our houses to teach them because they don't have that trust in us as individuals but they have that trust in the establishment and I think we have a duty to make sure that trust is maintained by offering them good quality education and people might say it's a bit emotional but I always used to think would I want to send my own son or daughter to this college? And I really want to take this college to a level where I feel comfortable that anyone can come into this organisation.

Again, he makes three important points here. The first about some teachers not doing their work puts pressure on other teachers. This could be admin work if two teachers are sharing the same class or preparing learners for exams or perhaps marking students' work. For example, if both teachers were equally responsible for learner progression and tutorial responsibilities, but one teacher ended up doing more than their fair share of the assigned work. The second about trust – parents believe that the college is a good, safe and reliable organisation and by having no accountability, that trust will be betrayed. It could be argued that winning parents' and external stakeholders' trust here was more important than that of the teachers who may see the evaluative nature of quality agendas with suspicion. The third point about accountability needs to be unpacked further because there was a similar theme in some of the teachers' accounts and also in the experience Hector, who is Director of Quality, shared with me.

Hector observed a teacher who was trying to teach students grammatical concepts based on his flawed understanding and Hector had to intervene by offering him subject-specific coaching. A study by Hill, Kapitula, & Umland (2011) cited in Wind *et al.* (2018, p. 485) mentions how some maths teachers confused students because of gaps in their own subject specific knowledge. These errors would never have been detected through any other evaluation mechanism as students in those classes had performed well in assessments and received high test scores. This supports Simon's

interpretation of the college quality improvement plan as the key driver of better learner experience and teacher development as the practice of 'surveillance' provides valuable diagnostic information about the teacher; therefore, it informs departmental Quality Improvements Action Plan (QIAP). Additionally, it provides insights into the issues of trust and faith parents and guardians put in curriculum leaders and their ability to manage poor teaching in a well-established organisation. However, he did not seem happy with the efficacy of the existing system:

> We are not where we need to be but that is the drive we need to have and for it to happen I believe we need to have accountability for you for me for every everyone in this organisation, not just teachers.

It is interesting to juxtapose the principal's take on this issue with Luke's position who was generally very critical of the quality systems.

> I mean I'm in the Union but I can understand that there are some elements within this organisation where teaching is below what I would consider decent enough to send my child to this college, and I would expect that the college was using its observation policy to ensure that [it was] either improved or was fixed up by changing the person that was delivering, but then that's my point of view.

The first and the last part of this extract is important to note here as Luke reminds me of his allegiance to the Union and then finishes his point by saying that it was his personal opinion. Luke, here, speaks as a parent not as a union member who is critical of the college Quality policy – a parent like many other parents Simon was talking about. This attracts attention to something important – a gap in Luke's position as a parent and as his take on observation schemes as a teacher. This gap, however, does not exist in Simon's position as a father and what he does or thinks in his capacity as a college principal. In Foucauldian analysis, it is not important to figure out which of these positions is an accurate or true representation of the 'real'. What nonetheless is important is to identify the processes and the archaeology of existing systems which enabled Luke and Simon to share a similar view on one aspect of the quality mechanism. If quality improvement systems are to be seen as a mode of power, it produces contradictory views expressed by Luke in two different

subject positions. The production of subjectivity and behaviour in Luke's and Simon's case is an example of how 'a subject can only speak within the limits imposed upon him by the discursive frameworks circulating at the time' (Mills, 2005, p. 29).

In this case, the limits are imposed by 2 conflicting discourses – the discourse of quality improvement and its relevance as a senior manager and as parent and the discourse of some teachers' beliefs, who are themselves a bit dubious about the advantages of these accountability systems. In this sense, power is not repressive but multidirectional and productive as it is behind the production of a discourse that informs local parent-college relations. 'The term power designates relationships' (Foucault 2000a, p. 337) and there is 'no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled' (Foucault, 1998, p. 94). It is this form of neoliberal power which links trust to accountability and control. A system in which teacher performance based on measurable outcomes has to be seen as self-evident by parents regardless of their subject position as a teacher and as a union member. The installation of this marketized accountability, productivity and sublime control is part and parcel of re-professionalisation of education.

From the 1998 green paper to Tony Blair's education reforms and then in the developments introduced by the coalition and the Conservative governments, the underlying ethos in education policy making has been concerned with increasing teachers' accountability in order to bring the teaching profession in line with the demands of the twenty-first century. Various reformation initiatives have been based on 'the need for teachers to be far more accountable to their schools, their parents, and communities, and, above all, the government' even if it means 'challenging traditional notions of individual professional autonomy, then so be it' (Furlong, 2013: p. 33). That teachers are expected to embrace this notion of accountability, which may not be similar to the teachers' own vision of how they should be held responsible for the work they do in and outside the classroom, is evident in the existing educational structure and confirmed by the data collected for this research.

So, are observations and other quality schemes the right tools to obtain an accurate picture of the quality of teaching? Any attempts that require answers to this question and the related concepts need to be problematized. Accountability of teachers and any policies designed for that purpose are

unavoidably political. When it comes to the nuts and bolts of assessing quality in teaching practices, do quality improvement initiatives serve the needs and interests of teachers or are they informed by neoliberal philosophies? How might elements of showcasing and the teachers' level of experience make the existing policy agendas self-defeating? 'In neoliberalism the patterning of power is established on contract, which in turn is premised upon a need for compliance, monitoring and accountability, organised in a management line and established through a purchase contract based upon measurable outputs' (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 187).

7.2.2. The discursive practices of FE teachers

Teachers, working fulltime, at Northlands College have twenty-four teaching hours on their weekly timetable. The rest of the time is spent on lesson planning, meetings, marking, writing and responding to emails and getting course folders comprising of planning documents such as schemes of learning, student profiles, individual learning plans, records of work, progress tracking sheets and tutorial records et cetera in order. These teachers, although qualified and experienced, seem to have limited or no say in how courses should run, which curriculum should be taught and how students should be assessed. These decisions are made by the senior management team following discussion of government policies and funding options. Information is then cascaded down the organisation by directors and communicated through middle management to the teaching staff. In the scheme of things, my area of interest lies in regulation of teacher conduct, how teachers construct their own positions in the system and how they are being positioned by that system.

A Foucauldian reading of teachers, in which subjectivities are not fixed and unified but rather produced discursively, draws attention to teachers' understanding of themselves as knowledgeable practitioners and their position as learners who are constantly briefed about the direction of their practices. Teachers usually comply with instructions as any attempts to refuse can have implications for their jobs, especially in colleges such as Northlands that have recently been through several major organisational reviews.. In one of the consultation meetings, the deputy principal responsible for curriculum told teachers, 'you are not going to like this, but the easiest people to replace are teachers'. This meeting was held between teacher trainers and senior management before the last restructuring (in June, 2017), where teacher trainers were enquiring about the possibility of them applying for normal teaching positions if they were made redundant. This 'ideology, which regards

people as commodities whose value lies in their ability to serve the economy, undermines any role that Further Education' teachers 'play in the positive development of society', the organisation and the students in particular (Brown, 2017, p. 50). Ideas such as these are not about developing individuals for their own good but making them financially viable for their organisation and the economy. An example of this is in Luke's interview:

> Doesn't really matter about the individual achievement or the individual or the individual pastoral care that we offer or anything like that, that's of no value to a corporation. Corporation is about profit. It's about profitability and sustainability.

A mindset which gives the impression that individual achievement is important, does so because its inherent logic stems from profitability. In the education sector it uses the discourse of learning to increase profit margins and economic growth. The history of curricula changes and educational policies in the last few decades reveals a process of reconstructing the scope of education defined and limited by an economic rationale rather than based on a collaborative relationship between educators and policy makers. An example of such policy initiatives can be found in the concept of 'lifelong learning' introduced in the 1960s and 70s and still considered valid. This idea aims to shift the responsibility of personal and professional development onto individuals; this means the cost of learning is also part of individuals' responsibilities. The concept came from organisations such as UNESCO and OECD and had no involvement of teachers at local levels. Again, it stemmed from the trends in global market needs rather than any academic principles. Lifelong learning 'represents a late capitalistic solution to "investing in people" – in their human, cultural and social capital – as the key to future employment, economic growth, mobility and cohesion' (Thompson, 2000, p. 134). I will discuss this concept and the politics behind it in detail in a later section, but this is a pertinent example of how teachers' professional work has been redesigned based on economic principles.

7.2.3. Reconfiguring the 'distribution of the sensible'

Based on the discussion presented in the literature review, it would appear that it is a top-down operation whereby policymakers' decisions are framed by senior management and then teachers are left to implement the revised guidelines. As a consequence of this, the system creates inequality whilst giving an impression that there is an equality of opportunity, as teachers are free to plan and

deliver their lessons based on their professional judgement. However, they do not choose the courses and exam bodies and policy trajectories linked to curriculum planning. Curriculum changes are usually based on consumer demands rather than social needs. As Gloria explains,

> So it's political. Whether it is for the benefit of education, I don't know anymore, I really don't. I think it's very tactical, very straight up business plan. How we're going to make money, what can we do to reduce costs? And what can we do to get rid of people to make sure we can save on budget. We've been told in meetings that they are clients; students are clients. *Clients!* [additional stress] That's the term we've been referred to for students which I think is outrageous.

If students are seen as clients, their needs must be met and in this context needs will translate into courses students want to do. Nonetheless, neoliberal markets do not respond to the needs of those clients who cannot pay. Therefore, the college will not offer courses purely based on student aspirations; any curricular offer and change in policy will be determined by questions such as: Will the proposed course bring funding? What qualifications are local employers looking for? Etc. In other words, these planning decisions are tied to the economic necessities and by no means indicative of individuals' social needs.

Although some teachers had a slightly different view on this, but none of the participants denied that leaving teachers out of policy making exercises was helpful for teachers or learners. Gloria was of the view that their contribution needed to be extended by providing teachers unrestricted access to senior leadership team meetings.

> When you have those executive meetings, have a teacher representative that can come in and say right this is what we think. But we've been taken over by people who really don't care about that.

The absence of teachers' voice in high-powered meetings in this context may suggest that they are not seen as part of the elite club that dictates the strategic course of action. In approaching the analysis of power relations, there is a political dimension to the understanding of power relations.

Gloria's statement above calls for redistribution of remits which involves collective decision-making. Gloria's point is about rewriting this script and reimagining this hierarchical structure.

Luke expressed a similar view by insinuating that senior management did not have first-hand knowledge of teaching practices and was far removed from classroom realities:

> I don't like the corporate nature of teaching now. I don't like that a lot of people who are in senior positions don't have teaching -not qualifications - but don't seemingly have much teaching experience and don't come at it from an educational perspective so therefore they introduce systems and procedures and policies that don't necessarily help a teacher to help a student. They help a corporation to appear to be doing the right thing for whichever body's inspecting them for example.

In this power structure, there are hierarchically imposed procedures that Luke and Gloria take issue with, purely because these policies and procedures undermine teachers' professional autonomy. The lack of pedagogical knowledge on the part of the senior leadership makes teachers' deliverers rather than producers of knowledge. Nonetheless, pedagogical knowledge does not appear to be professional knowledge as the Deputy Principal made clear in his statement, mentioned above, that getting rid of teachers was not a problem because finding their replacement was easy. This implies that replacing senior management is quite the opposite. But that begs the question: What makes senior managers more valuable than teachers? What emerges from the data and my observation of various settings in the college suggest that it is the knowledge of finance, information systems, human resources and knowledge of performance and accountability assessment that matters and counts as powerful knowledge. It is in this sense the management system is dubbed by Luke "the corporate nature of teaching".

For Alice however this dichotomy between pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of business principles was self-evident and she was fine with that.

Well I don't know the ins and outs of the finance ... there are certain things that are requirements. So I can't just teach like I am in the prairies. Because there're requirements that have come down from above and they have to be [met].

She went on to explain why these requirements are justified:

They're well intentioned. Somebody has sat down and thought really really hard about what the best way to educate people is, you know. They've been paid money to do it.

What this highlights is a power structure in which people are valued for what type of knowledge they possess. The point is that it is not about academic knowledge but the knowledge that is required to run any organisations or a business centre is more valuable than having a research-oriented profile. The idea of having managerial and financial knowledge, essential to run an organisation and keep the whole operation financially viable, displays an adaptation to neoliberal reason. Policies are well-intentioned and useful because the architects of those policies have powerful knowledge and have invested their time in devising them – something teachers know little about. An example was given by Gabriella:

And I really do look at the policies and I really do try and take it on board, but I also really do have limited time- we all do. I'll try my best but also will do it in my way. Some of that I think is okay and some of that probably means because I just haven't got the time to sit down and really [think about it].

It could be argued that teachers do not have time to think about allocation of resources or identify the overall educational objectives in the grand scheme of things. The essence of teachers' dissatisfaction with the process of policymaking suggests that there is no simple relationship between knowledge and their subject positions. It is not that teachers' subjectivity is a site of ignorance in this context, neither do they fail to recognise the workings of power. They feel that the policy makers do not capitalise on their professional knowledge and experience; they feel excluded. The other issue is about lack of time. They find themselves busy due to their teaching timetable

whereas managers get time to read and think about policies. Teachers are not less intelligent; they just do not get that time or it is not expected of them. That is where it becomes an issue of equality. I would argue that teachers need to be given time to read policies and respond to them; they should also be given time to read newspapers and in particular education sections – this needs to be acknowledged on their timetable. This is one of the ways that would allow us to rethink about existing knowledge structures and how they can be reimagined and redistributed.

Drawing on Ranciere (1991), Harman argues that the "Platonic myth" that links knowledge to someone's position in a society, 'where everyone knows their place and where each person does what they are destined to do' ... 'contributes to the ongoing separation of academic and practical reason with the academic positioned as "the knower" and the oppressed as "ignorant" of their own oppression'. Therefore, in order to move away from the concept of 'misrecognition', we need to be able to engage in the study of the expressions of subjective experience that we hold to be reliable (Harman, 2017, p. 2). Harman's suggestion of considering alternative possibilities by rethinking knowledge – ignorance binary, is informed by the Rancierian notion of dissensus which could open avenues of equality and reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible leading to the creation of theoretical frameworks for 'the production of new meanings and subjectivities' (ibid, p. 2).

The evidence of dissensus in this context lies in forms of teachers' refusals to comply with policies when they are not being watched. An example of that is in Luke's account of policies and their implementation:

> There are so many changes and going around and around and around in circles that teachers ultimately think that sort of just give up on the new policy I think and *they have a tendency to just do what they've always done*. They don't make changes to their teaching to reflect that policy.

He thinks that sometimes everchanging policies and quality improvement schemes can be very confusing:

> Mov[ing] from one model to another model to another model... Okay that's great but it's ultimately all mumbo jumbo

Gloria' expressed a similar view in different words:

> It's just like a never-ending factory of let's mastermind it, let's cryptonise it, let's make it into a cryptic factor, crack the code to do this. It doesn't have to be that difficult. Teaching and learning is obvious in a classroom... *leave us alone to do the job that we want to do.* How many more times do I have to keep jumping [through] another hoop to validate my position my job?

Teachers not conforming to certain policies - either because they find them a little too opaque or the frequency of changes has been ever-increasing - depicts specific behaviours that make power-relations at Northlands College 'transversal' as opposed to vertically oppressive (Foucault, 1982a, p. 780).

> Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix – no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body
>
> (Foucault, 1981b, p. 94).

Both Luke and Gloria seem to make an interesting case for a type of teaching practices that display a model that does not accord with prescribed models when observations are not taking place. All participants working as teachers suggested that their observed lessons are significantly different to the ones delivered most of the times. Put another way, an average full-time teacher is expected to deliver 836 hours in an academic year and there is only one full observation that lasts 40 to 60 minutes; this is in addition to 2 learning walks of 30 to 50 minutes. Therefore, they deliver around 834 hours of teaching in a way in which they think is appropriate for their local context. In other words, they are not genuinely convinced about the efficacy of certain aspects of TLA policies and

consequently do not allow those agendas to control their conduct. It is in this sense, we witness the production of new subjectivities whereby teachers *exercise* their power to make their practices a site of dissension and a site of escape. Here, power is not 'possessed' by anyone; it is exercised with the possibility of going beyond tasks traditionally assigned to actors in different subject positions. The operation of power is based on 'the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relation' (Foucault, 1981b, p. 94). Gloria's desire in the 'leave us alone' statement can be interpreted as a means of making herself free from regulatory impositions – the absence of any apparent surveillance help her and other teachers out of their pedagogical predicament. 'There is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight' (Foucault, 1982a, p. 794).

Another issue in the power structure and policies was identified by Gabriella who said that she understands why performance management is important but is not entirely comfortable with how policies are disseminated and the way teachers are treated.

> I mean there's a really good side to having these policies, a really good side. Usually
> they are based on sense... I do think that [they] stop us from sitting back. Do you
> know what I mean? It stops us from going oh I have got this done and dusted and
> just churning stuff out.

In educational policies the actual problem, in her view, lies in the process and how teachers are being treated or the way they think they are being treated.

> We are human beings, we don't ... we are not data, I suppose. We are not numbers...
> I would not be so arrogant and say I know better, but I definitely am me and I have
> my way of wording and doing things.

The central theme emerging from these views is about organisational hierarchies and gaps in teachers' knowledge, and those knowledge gaps are engineered by the system through assigning respective roles and responsibilities to various actors in the organisation. For example, teachers are either not given time or they choose not to think about policy shifts and the college's curricular aims. As a consequence, this deficiency makes their role in the power structure rather limited, and they

would appear less knowledgeable in strategic areas that are deemed essential in the day-to-day business operation of any organisation.

This discussion is perhaps relevant to all Further Education organisations and raises questions about some general principles and procedures related to curriculum development, delivery, assessment methods and education policy more generally. In fact, this concept of 'knowledge-ignorance binary' in terms of decision making in FE enables us to consider ways in which inequality governs educational institutions. How education policies are translated and interpreted is a matter for senior management to look at rather than teachers. But the decisions made as a result of it are fundamentally important for teachers as they determine the direction of their planning and delivery, and in some instances affects their timetables too. The lack of access to what happens in the executive meetings makes teachers less privileged, less knowledgeable and less equipped to deal with the political framing that gives shape to their everyday practices. As Arda (1997: 16) puts it: 'In a job as unpredictable as teaching, the only thing that teachers can count on with certainty is that they will be expected to respond dutifully to mandated policy changes regardless of how those changes might 'fit' with their existing views, practices, needs, or preferences. Despite recent efforts such as action research, teacher-research, and other 'teacher empowerment' initiatives, teachers have little real control over their work'. In an attempt to find a solution, Thiessen (1993) has analysed teachers' success in meeting challenges in the classroom and discussed how having a no say in meetings about the running of the whole operation in the boardroom can have a negative impact on their work and professionalism. He suggests involving teachers in the process of decision making through policy-making councils. What we see here is a similar solution proposed by Gloria and is also evident in Luke's and Gabriella's explications.

7.2.4. Deconstruction of the dominant 'real'

As I have already stated in the methodology chapter, Foucault's genealogy entails questioning what is taken for granted and challenging assumptions based on 'common sense'. This could be done in two ways: first by exploring connections between policies and practices or as Gherardi's (2010, pp. 155-56) puts it, by shifting the 'analysis from practice to a field of practices which contains it'; Secondly, by examining chronicles of policy development and the ideological forces behind those policies in order to understand relationships between power, knowledge and bodies. Central to my

argument, then, is the assertion that neoliberalism is a pivotal force in shaping education policies that work to *regulate* rather than *improve* teaching practices in FE today. A genealogical (in Foucauldian sense) analytic frame involves the deconstruction of commonly accepted 'knowledge' – as well as the deconstruction of the factors that contributed in knowledge formation. In the context of this study, it includes investigating what is taught in classrooms and considered a dominant discourse, how it came into being and why it replaced previous discourses now seen on the fringes of society. In the last decade, ESOL qualifications have gradually diminished from the current educational paradigm and been replaced by Functional Skills curricula. The content and form of ESOL courses and the grounds on which they were organised did not accord with the ethos of policies of neoliberalism. The reformed policy can be as seen 'the statement'. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, a statement not as an utterance but as a text which is ratified as 'knowledge' as it carries an institutional stamp of validation. The manifestation of a state-authored change in curriculum prepares the ground for the development of the subjects who are economically self-interested in lieu of the process wherein individuals receive education to promote social justice. It is in this sense that the creation of the Functional Skills curriculum can be classified as 'a statement' seeking to produce new subjectivities.

7.2.5.   From 'Skills for Life' to 'Functional Skills'

The idea of Functional Skills qualifications originates from the 2004 Tomlinson report (Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform) in which Tomlinson suggested that improving young peoples' functional maths, English and ICT was an essential part of getting the basics right. Functional Skills were also given a primary importance in the Implementation Plan that followed the 14-19 Educational Skills White Paper (2005, p. 36). In 2007, the World Class Skills paper (Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England), described the use of functional skills as 'part of the Employability Skills Programme aimed at getting unemployed people back into work'. A three-year pilot programme introduced Functional Skills qualification for the first time in 2007 with the intension of replacing Key Skills and Skills for Life qualifications with a 'single strategy for the development of English, mathematics and ICT skills'. Following the three-year Functional Skills pilot, different awarding bodies started offering revised accredited Functional Skills qualifications in summer 2010. In 2011, the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) published

an 'independent evaluation of the Functional Skills three-year pilot'. Finally in the beginning of 2102, all awarding bodies were advised to replace Skills for Life qualifications with Functional Skills qualifications for the 2012/13 academic year (Education and Training Foundation).

Since the main aim of Functional Skills qualifications is to help the unemployed find work as well as offering Entry Level 1-3, Level 1 and Level 2 stand-alone qualifications, they have also became an essential part of apprenticeship programmes. For example, a successful completion of an advanced apprenticeship programme requires a Level 2 achievement in English, maths and ICT. A GCSE grade 2.5 to 3.5 is equivalent to Level 1 Functional Skills and GCSE grades 4.5 to 7 are equivalent to Level 2 Functional Skills.

The 'Key Skills' referred to maths and English skills learners needed to develop in order to achieve their vocational qualifications. The idea of embedding maths and English stems from Key Skills. Skills for Life was defined as a 'strategy to improve the literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy skills of adults ... through innovative teaching and learning, whole organisation approach' and 'professional development... the focus of the improvement programme' was 'on the improvement of the quality of the learner's experience an on improving teaching and learning' (Education and Training Foundation).

Since October 2012 onwards, ESOL practitioners and campaigners have raised their voice against the inappropriateness of Functional Skills assessments for ESOL learners. (See Schellekens, 2011). Schellekens argued that in the absence of the essential elements of the language such as grammar and pronunciation, the assessment focus of Functional Skills qualifications is not suitable for students of other languages. She stated that most ESOL learners will not be able to achieve Functional Skills qualifications in this situation and it would not benefit employers, tutors and more importantly the learners themselves. These courses do not make an explicit distinction between ESOL learners and native users of English with literacy needs. The Functional Skills exams also used cultural references which ESOL learners are unlikely to be familiar with. For example, the role of local councils in leafy suburbs and organising group events in local community centres requires learners to demonstrate their knowledge of British society as well as their writing and reading skills in English.

7.2.6.   The discourse of employability

This shift in policy can be seen as part of an attempts that seek to create enterprising and competitive entrepreneurs. The main idea is related to the importance of 'money' and how education can be used to strengthen the economy and is made responsive to market demands. The change is evident in a reformed set of priorities that dictate teaching practices and leave no doubt about how educational objectives should be linked to the optimal growth of economic efficiency.

The notion of 'employability' in education is more than just about learning skills; it is a kind of political action. It provides the basis upon which the structural foundations of education have been laid according to the principles of individual choices and adaptations rather than collective responsibilities. The state is not interested in education for the sake of education anymore; education whereby a good understanding of culture and language is shaped and that is based on various forms of critical thinking. It is more about gaining knowledge and skills that could benefit the economy. The Further Education sector has witnessed a big shift. The market-based discourses of education have revamped the strategic and procedural policies that dictate methods and tools for evaluating success and performance in education (Olssen et al, 2004). One example that Charlotte used to emphasise this change was about how the ESOL curriculum had been changed over time.

> The type of exam we do … is all about things that… you could take to your work.
> Place measuring a carpet so as in the end you could go and get a job in a some kind
> of measuring facility as opposed to exams that we used to do that were more
> student-centred that will give them the life skills for example shopping or going to
> the doctor … So as an example, when I was teaching E1 (Entry Level 1 ESOL) and I
> had a certain amount of time to get through curriculum then when I had to teach
> Functional Skills Maths, something had to go… the time I had to teach maths meant
> that one of the topics we kind of lost was 'health' - speaking, going to the doctors,
> naming parts of your body… I had to teach 3D shapes at the expense of [pause] you
> know teaching words for health [that] would really help them in their everyday
> lives.

Entry Level 1 ESOL is beginners' English class. Improving ESOL students' communication skills is likely to transform their lives in terms of how they are able to function in a society, but it is not going

to be as beneficial to the economy in the same way as an immediate new addition to the low-skilled work force would. Education providers now work on business principles. Ball (2013, pp. 13-14) writes about 'the role of education as a producer of labour, of basic and 'high skills''. 'Education is now regarded primarily from an economic point of view. The social and economic purposes of education have been collapsed into a single, overriding emphasis on policy making for economic competitiveness and an increasing neglect or side-lining .... of social purposes of education'. The contemporary education system is defined by 'prescriptions [of] economism' (Lingard et al, 1998, p. 84). Now the purpose of social development and intellectual stimulation has been replaced by funding provisions that prepare students to enter the workforce. Charlotte made a point about funding and student needs.

> We get less funding from central and local government, the focus has been more on
>
> retaining and passing students in exams than having a curriculum that focuses on
>
> the student and what's best for the student.

So, what is best for a student? Discussions about this point are endless. For the principal of the college, Simon, students need to be employment-ready so the purpose of education 'would be becoming good citizens, getting a job, getting into careers that they enjoy and having successful lives'. One could argue knowing mathematics and learning about numbers is an integral part of that. For Charlotte's students, in her view, learning about health was more important for students as it would have enabled them to become more engaged citizens. However, this aspect of the syllabus 'had to go' because there was no money for it.

> Functional Skills ... is what the government funds now, and in order to keep our
>
> lessons free, we do exams that are not really suitable for ESOL students.

The government is not willing to invest in courses that prepare Charlotte's learners for life. These learners are expected to learn skills in mathematics that they can offer to their potential employers in exchange for a job. The continual political injunctions infused with the spirit of the market have gradually and progressively commodified educational provisions.

Another example of this commodification would be the change in the lexis that is used to talk about educational processes.

7.2.7. Politics of changing vocabularies

A link between employment and education can be traced in a gradual shift in the vocabulary used to describe practices in education. This change in lexis becomes increasingly apparent in a shift away from overarching educational objectives defined by collectivism to adopting measurable 'learning' outcomes that can be achieved by individuals. The practice of assigning ILPs (Individual Learning Plans) to learners also contributes to the development of discernible 'common sense' about contemporary teaching and learning practices. The idea of ILPs is related to the 'management' of learning as they bring individual learning needs in line with 'institutional objectives' by constraining 'pedagogy into linear, goal-oriented and instrumentalist practices' (Beighton, 2012, pp. 26-27). The recent popularity of the word 'learning' has been characterised as '*learnification* of educational discourse and practice' by Biesta who opines that this change is part of a discursive shift that constitutes referring to 'education as teaching and learning... students as learners... adults as adult learners ... teachers as facilitators of learning...schools as learning environments or places of learning' and replacing adult education with 'lifelong learning' (2013, p. 5).

In my discussion with both members of the senior leadership team, the word education remained absent, but the words such as 'learning' and 'learners' got several mentions. The principal was unequivocal in his definition and the purpose of learning whilst showing doubts about the efficacy of educational research:

> I am quite sceptical about some of the research and I am more driven by the impact it has on learners and you know. That's what we need to focus on – no matter what strategies or what framework is there. I think as practitioners you have got to think about you know are they getting what they need to? Are they getting into employment? I think if that is fine, it shouldn't matter what [research] is around.

According to this school of thought, the sole purpose of education is to make 'learners' employment ready – the academic focus is less important or perhaps not important at all in Simon's view. This

also implies that the worth of education is determined by its potency of the development of skills demanded by the market – skills that could be sold in the world of business for jobs, status and money. The impact could of course be assessed in terms of measurable outcomes defined by the trends of the market. This is the new 'common sense' in education. This neoliberal ethos works to undo the traditional teaching practices in which the collective processes of discovering social structures based on oppression were carried out via emancipatory pedagogies (Freire, 1972).

Hector, the Director of Quality, was keen on teachers working to help students remember and understand their ILPs and individual targets that teachers are supposed to set with them. He said teachers are expected to work with each learner and make them understand and remember their targets that linked to the course and their long term career.

> I don't think it is happening when we're not [in the classroom observing teachers]
> because otherwise students would be able to articulate their learning as they [do
> when we observe them] with the best teachers.

When asked about how he would define an outstanding lesson, he said:

> an outstanding lesson is one [in which] students are learning and they're enjoying
> their learning

The emphasis on learning and linking it to individual student needs concurs with Biesta's discussion on differences between 'learning' and 'education' and the idea that students are learning for themselves or expected to learn for themselves; he states that 'education' unlike 'learning' is not an individualistic or individualising expression.

One of the key features of politics of learning is the emptiness or neutrality of the word 'learning' in regards to purpose and content; this is not true for 'education'. The overarching use of the word 'learning' in educational settings remains meaningless until the purpose and direction of learning is defined and also 'what the content of the learning is… the point of education… is never just that students learn, but that they learn *something* and that they learn this for particular *reasons* … the

fact that language is an individualistic and individualising term – learning is after all, something one can only do for oneself; it is not possible to learn for somebody else' [emphasis in original] (2013, p. 6). This argument, in Biesta's view, stems from neo-liberal policies and politics of education, and works to digress the debate from the value of relationships in education; therefore, makes it problematic to examine what teachers' roles and responsibilities are. This is probably why teachers largely remain unaware of, or they are given a subliminal message that discourages them to stay in touch with, the political dimensions of their work.

Charlotte, during her stay at Northlands College, has witnessed a big change in the way teaching and observations are used to serve slightly different purposes.

> I am just trying to think how they've changed it over the time. What I've noticed is that the learning outcomes get more attached to work...jobs ... the idea that [in] education you are learning for yourself ... the link is to an outcome which is mainly based either in Further Education or directly into a job, but in the end it's focused to work ...so yeah... I've noticed that they're all now very much focused to outside ... to economic progress... work related economic progress. All education is focused towards a job ... yeah it's market-led, isn't it? [Students have] got to pass, they've got to move towards employment whether its Further or Higher Education, the end result is the job at the end of the day.

Charlotte's point about the connection of learning outcomes with economic progress is overarchingly political as it reflects a big shift in the direction of education policies and practices in recent years. The contemporary discourse of learning is concerned with the development of human capital rather than human development; in this model, economic growth and competitiveness is of paramount importance (ibid). According to Olssen et al (2004), the state wants to provide the right conditions for the market by producing competitive and enterprising individuals. Any learning needs to be linked with economic growth and viability and it cannot be seen as equivalent to education for the sake of democratic participation: education to raise moral, political and ethical awareness of students. In this sense, consumer demands take precedence over social needs. This sort of ideology with neoliberal technologies systematically commodifies education that 'could be traded in the

marketplace for money or status. The skills required in education will reflect the nature of the market' (ibid, p. 180).

The idea of lifelong learning is an individualistic idea and has been used to get rid of the principles based on the welfare state. In modern education, employability defines the value of curriculum and how it is delivered. Schemes of learning are not just seen as means of developing critical thinking skills and promoting moral qualities like fairness, care and honesty in an educational sense, their aim is also to protect the interest of the market. A Scheme of Learning (SoL) document was previously known as 'Scheme of Work' (SoW) at Northlands College. These documents state the content and structure of the course in terms of teaching, learning and assessment methods and how they link to what Ofsted want to see in planning documents, for example, development of Maths and English, safeguarding, British values, employability skills.

Students are seen as existing customers and future entrepreneurs. What dictates classroom practise is linked to the potential for economic growth and social mobility rather than purely professional expectations informed by moral values, for instance sense of duty, altruism, commitment, intellectual independence, care and imagination. This is an overview of the factors that are historically and socially specific to a particular situation in a particular context and setting at a particular time, which enable individuals to see language beyond fixed 'truths' and 'common sense'; they open possibilities of a variety of discursive systems of meaning (Weedon, 1987, p. 115).

The dilemma for teachers nowadays is that they are only expected to develop students' employability skills. Raising students' awareness of civic duty, encouraging critical thinking, and developing intellectual capacity does not even get a mention when senior leaders in FE talk about teachers' roles and responsibilities. Simon, the principal, also maintained the view that some learners who do not do well in FE is because of their way of thinking. He said it was the teachers' job to change the mindset which prevents learners from acquiring employability skills. If learners can develop a growth mindset, they will be able to restructure their identity to become more suited to contemporary demands in relation to the marketability of knowledge.

> I encourage my team to do growth mindset so one of the first sessions we delivered
> was purely on growth mindset to make sure we encourage ... to remove those

barriers before we actually start teaching them and this growth mindset wasn't just
done in first session. It continued throughout to motivate people

There is an assumption that it is the learners' own way of thinking that acts as a barrier to the acquisition of knowledge and development of skills rather than experiences grounded in unequal social conditions that are beyond their control. The learning is dependent on the teachers' ability to address the fixed-mindset students bring with them. In other words, learners are autonomous choosers and can change themselves if they want to – it is an individualistic operation.

He was of the view that if teachers changed students thinking about what they can or cannot do and the choices available to them, they can potentially benefit from their education in the same way their counterparts who have the 'right' mindset or who work hard to 'develop' their skills do. He gave a personal example:

I didn't enjoy writing when I was a learner, I loved maths, but I ended up in a profession where I have to write all the time, so I was just saying to them that you know you develop these skills. Don't limit yourself. So that's what I mean by this. Again, if you look at wellbeing issues at the moment, you could have so many learners with so many different issues in your classroom and the teachers have to find a way to deal with that.

The interpretation of this logic takes two forms – the first that the skills required by the job market are now the central rationale for choice. The second description involves reconstruction of learner identity shaped by material self-interest and individualised want that can be influenced by teachers. The emphasis in 'on the need for individuals to adapt and adjust to the demands for the global economy in the reformulation of lifelong learning as the acquisition of a set of flexible skills and competencies' and there is a 'subtle but crucial semantic shift from "lifelong education" – a relational concept – to "lifelong learning" – and individualistic concept" (Biesta, 2013, p. 7).

The idea of facilitating personalisation can be a seen a step towards commodification aiming to create citizen consumers. These citizen consumers have 'choices' in terms of the career options and

the type of education they want their children to have. If an 11-year-old cannot pass a grammar school entry test, they are not good for learning classical languages and about the rivers of the world. 'Go and do some vocational courses, something hands on. Some kids are brighter than others; get over it' I heard these words in a popular radio phone-in from a listener whose views about innate abilities and intelligence were endorsed by the broadcaster. This approach does not acknowledge and consider issues around habitus and cultural capital, and how people with a bit of cash can get their children privately tutored to pass the grammar school test. Ball (2013) suggests that it is the individualistic middle class who benefit from choice policies, and in an attempt to create competition and more choices, these policies end up increasing inequality in terms of class differences.

7.3. Conclusion

Using Northlands College as a case study, the organising theme for this chapter has been the discourse of neoliberalism and how it dominates the practices of policy making and teaching in FE. The driving force behind the ensemble of policies and practices discussed in this analysis is quite perspicuous; it is finance. All of this is related to a set of general principles the Conservative Party traditionally upholds about education. As Michael Gove, an influential frontbencher in the existing government, then the Education Secretary pronounced in his first month in office that he 'had "no ideological objection" to businesses making profit from the new generation of academies and free schools' (Guardian 31 May 2010 quoted in Ball, 2013, p. 225), the space of teaching and learning is clearly defined by an economic rationale. In order to bring it in line with the demands of the market, FE education policy has been subject to unending changes which are not always popular with teachers as they do not accord with the traditional purposes historically assigned to educational institutions. This, at times, creates a gap between what teachers do in the classroom and what they are expected to do. The gap is evident in the professional space teachers create and find in unobserved lessons whereby their practices are not wholly manufactured from the top. Their bodies are not 'docile' or as Foucault would argue 'What I've said does not mean that we are trapped, but we are always free - well, anyway, that there is always the possibility of changing' (1997b, p. 167).

Neoliberalism's core assumptions about teaching and learning tend to treat them as static, linear and measurable. The use of quality improvement agendas enables the observation and assessment of these practices in terms of their calculability, predictability and efficiency. This view is based on homogeneity of practices, bearing one simple message about them resulting in the pronouncement of a regime of disciplinary judgements such as outstanding, good, requires improvement or inadequate. A perspective which sees practices as straightforward embodiments of these judgements is problematic especially when these pedagogical processes are inherently fluid, incidental and non-linear taking place in a complex and transversal environment. It is this argument that I take further in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8

8. Data analysis 3

8.1. Understanding and representing the complexity of teaching practices and transversality of hierarchies

8.1.1. Simultaneities and polymorphous connections

The main purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on the manifestation of complexity through an interpretation of teaching practices as well as to articulate the expressions of creativity and transversality by paying particular attention to *polymorphous connections* between teaching, learning and policy discourses. It will be a good idea to begin this section by analysing *simultaneities* in the classrooms and Quality Improvement offices at Northlands college. As mentioned earlier, simultaneities, in modern and Western schools of thought, refer to occurrences and situations that exist or happen at the same time but are seen as coincidental rather than co-implicated. However, a systematic exposition of such phenomena in the light of complexity thinking makes an analysis of mutual links between apparently unconnected events and cases possible in educational research (Davis, 2008).

One example of such simultaneity can be traced in the exercise of improving quality of education and the socio-material conditions in a particular classroom. The quality improvement mechanisms are generally oriented towards teaching practices without necessarily considering their complex relationship with the limits and opportunities connected with teachers' and learners' patterns of thoughts in particular settings which shape the modes of instruction. Describing the complex interplay between individuals and the quality of teaching, Gabriella asserted that:

> ...good teaching is sometimes good because [of] what the learners are doing. It's the
> mood the teacher is in. It's the mood the class is in and I know theoretically it comes
> from the top. You know the mood.

The reductive modes of thinking in education policy treat matters such as these as being distinct and unrelated. A teacher's explanation of a concept will only make sense if students are willing to engage

with the content happily. A temporary state of mind or feeling resulting from unanticipated social issues and predispositions may affect the level of personal understanding of the concepts discussed in a classroom. This is what Gabriella wanted to check that if I had understood her final point about 'mood' (You know the mood?) with a rising intonation.

Alice made a similar point but slightly differently:

> You have to do your assessment for learning, You have to pull them up if they're late ... you have to be upstanding, you have to walk around, monitor when perhaps you've got a headache. So, you do all of those things, but I think once you know you are supposed to do them, then you can.

The bodily activity of the teacher is determined by the type of situation she is in and if she feels the need to demonstrate its particular usage as a teacher when someone is in the classroom. This is an example of 'transphenomenality' which calls for the simultaneous deliberation of 'factors normally associated with apparently quite different phenomenal levels of explanation' (Mason, 2008, p. 7). Here, Gabriella and Alice are making a similar point, but one is about the learner experience and the latter looks at it from a teachers' perspective – two points about the same phenomenon that are seen as distinct and not associated with the quality of teaching but actually operate in conjunction with teaching practices and contribute background to understanding the inextricable links between elements. These links play an integral role in how educational practices entirely depend on '*alea* (chance) as a category in the production of events' (Foucault, 1981, p. 69).

Any quality review visit is unlikely to cater for the complexity of such phenomenon. What is seen and produced in the classroom is an embodiment of the mutual effects of a teacher's subject knowledge and pedagogical skills (what they are capable of) and their performance in the classroom (what they actually do). Therefore, it is difficult to draw a line between teachers' deliberate attempts to show that they meet the criteria and their frequent practices such as assessing students' prior knowledge or walking around the classroom to monitor students as a routine – things they do in their day-to-day teaching anyway.

Luke also mentioned the phenomenon of variables that affects teaching practices, when he discussed the level of difficulty he experienced when teaching a particular group of learners with behavioural issues. He said that sometimes 'it becomes almost impossible to teach anything' because of students' disruptive behaviour.

This aspect of teaching and learning which is dependent on the links between the type of learners and their dispositions was taken up further in Gabriella's account of teaching processes in the classroom:

> Some years [you get] a lumpy class and other years you get a passionate flying class...it is remarkable how that lesson would be different depending on the class...I think if one comes out saying 'wow that was outstanding', it's got so much to do with the moment and good fortune and where is that class today, where you are today. It's got such a lot of chance. Probably more likely is our outstanding teachers are probably not outstanding when they are being observed.

The way teaching practices are framed cannot be understood in mechanistic and linear terms when there are so many 'it depends' attached to them. Gabriella's assertion that practices change when there is an external gaze and consequently do not represent the true state of affairs calls into question the efficacy of the whole mechanism which is originally meant to assess the quality of practices as they take place. The pedagogical acts of checking students' learning, assigning challenging tasks because one has a 'passionate flying class' in front of them or lowering expectations and reducing the pace of delivery because the group is 'lumpy', complexify the process of teaching, learning and assessment; these acts produce many unintentional effects and open up new possibilities leading to results that would almost be impossible to predict at the initial stages of planning annual schemes of learning.

The efficacy of curriculum planning and how they are executed, in this sense, is linked to human cognitive systems. These systems as Donald (2002) points out are hybrid because they include individual minds and the dynamics created by collective attitude of students and the experience of teachers. In other words, these human cognitive systems are about the feelings of agents in a

particular setting and the circumstances outside their teaching space that impact the way they carry out their duties and how they impact practices. None of these factors are considered or seen as linked with quality of planning documents such as Schemes of Learning and other 'Intent' documents.

It is important to understand that the relational value of these factors in terms of the types of interactions amongst learners and teachers and the relationship between individuals' minds and bodies help us make sense of what exactly is quality assured and what is to be made of what we quality assure as well as how it may be very complex to cater for these issues when teaching practices are audited. This by no means suggests that poor or outstanding teaching is entirely based on students or how a teacher may be feeling on a particular day. Rather, the argument is that the reductive nature of pedagogical binaries - such as outstanding and inadequate - in quality improvement and observation policies is inherently political in the sense that these labels cannot be used to fully explain the increasingly complex nature of teaching practices. They can however be a useful performance management tool. For example, these grades or standards could be useful to colour-code practitioner profiles and to assign action plans for their appraisals, but their role in relation to gauging the efficacy of quality of educational processes remains questionable.

Gabriella's point about 'good fortune' and 'chance' therefore suggests that an instance of planning and delivering outstanding teaching practice is not always determined by one's professional ability and subject knowledge, but is in fact dependent on a range of other factors that involve the reorganisation of ideas on the part of the teachers and the reinterpretation of how teaching practices should be viewed in the classroom. By reorganisation, I mean how teachers readjust and reorganise their delivery based on the changing demands in terms of levels of student engagement, external influences and motivation. It is therefore these adaptations that determine the course of action that cannot always be planned in advance. The quality agendas that overlook these simultaneities, fail to see the underpinning complex relationship between the quality of teaching practices and the factors -mentioned by Gabriella, Luke and Alice – which may be seen as coincidental but not co-implicated.

To assume that quality improvement measures such as audits, learning walks and observations provide a rounded view of the actual standards of teaching performance is a common fallacy purely because it is beyond the scope of policy documents, which express the roadmap for evaluating

teaching, to accommodate this 'play of dependencies [which constitutes a] polymorphous cluster of correlations' (Foucault, 1978, p. 13). Simon who is also an Ofsted inspector as well as the college principal, pointed out:

> As an inspector, people often forget we are under a lot of pressure as well. You know you are going into an organisation; you have got no clue about the organisation. You have got to make judgements in less than four days. In my opinion, and you are under so much intense pressure, and everything has to be driven by evidence

Going to an organisation with 'no clue' and coming up with a judgement in less than four days' warrants pressure indeed. The crucial point is that, like any other complex system, each organisation and each classroom within that organisation is unique with its own ecology and the demands placed on people working there. It is therefore various features of those distinctive conditions such as particular type of learners in a particular classroom on a particular day with a particular teacher that form the polymorphous connections which then determine the course of action at a particular time. A four-day inspection would treat teaching practices as a singular event and see certain events as self-evident without examining the conditions which had been affecting the process. An example of those unique local conditions and their connection with factors, and how they may be perceived by an external Ofsted lens, was pointed out by Gabriella:

> Last year, I had [a student] who got a grade 9 [and] someone who got a grade 2 and I was more proud of that grade 2 than anything in that class. But if you had come into that class, you would have thought what is that learner doing? Well, I can tell you that learner is doing brilliantly. They are slightly autistic, they are engag[ed], they are sharing ideas. Actually, they are here, *they are here* (sentence stress) – that is a success that they're rocking up. So that unnerves me; the new Ofsted thing unnerves me because you know you can't go to the Ofsted person and say I know I know they are not learning very much but you know they have come to every single lesson you know. That – would be a black mark. If they've come to every single lesson, what have they learnt? Well, no actually the fact that they've come to every

single lesson when previously they were a serial absentee person and they suffer

from mental health issues. That! Yea, yea!

Simon's comment about the pressure on Ofsted inspectors due to time constraints needs to be read in conjunction with this comment about a student who failed their exam but made their teacher proud by showing up in each lesson and contributing a little. For inspectors, there is simply no time to consider the multiplicity of factors and to rediscover the 'connections, encounters, blockages, plays of forces, strategies, etc. that at a given moment establish what consequently comes to count as being self-evident, universal and necessary' (Foucault, 1987, p. 104). While Ofsted or any internal inspection would look at cases of these types with a sympathetic eye, the assessment criteria for judging quality of education is likely to translate into lower grades as a result of poor teaching which then will lead to an outcome that is unfavourable for a department or the college in which the student is enrolled. Any different decision or outcome would be the rejection of what is considered self-evident in a mode of thought that defines evidence-based teaching and evidence-based assessment of teaching. Foucault's conception of 'eventualisation' refers to a 'breach of self-evidence' of this type (ibid). Essentially, eventualisation would require looking at teaching, learning, assessment, learners and their results from a different angle – an angle whereby it is not self-evident that bad results are a product of bad teaching practices.

The discursive formations of knowledge, which inform the inspection criteria, presuppose the concept of assessment and accountability wherein student success rates and retention are sine qua non of high-quality teaching. According to the 2019 Education Inspection Framework (EIF), an inevitable outcome of desirable teaching practice is that students are able to articulate their learning and spell out how they have made improvements over time. The EIF is the latest discourse of education management in the state sector and like previous technologies of control, it sees all acts of teaching reducible. Its overall rationale is to measure the efficacy of all forms of teaching practices in every context by extending the market-based universal principles of calculability, efficiency and predictability to education. Nonetheless, we have seen that a range of factors mentioned by the participants of this research deny the possibility of any unification of thought which could be used to draw generic conclusions about the effectiveness of any provision at a classroom or college level.

Gabriella's explanation of students' grades and how the teaching that may be deemed outstanding are individualised instances and events. Individualised occurrences, as Frank puts it, are 'not predictable from the point of view of their structure, and contingent with the respect to the way they happen to be' (Frank, 1992, p. 110). For example, local conditions that are unique to a particular classroom, department or a college at a particular time have a defining impact on how its performance is judged. These conditions could be linked to the types of learners in a specific cohort, their economic and cultural capital, or the social and material conditions an organisation and the practitioners are experiencing at a certain period. In this sense the potency of teaching practices is dependent on unique conditions that cannot be predictable from the outset. It is precisely for those reasons that quality of education needs to explored by taking account of this uniqueness, complexity, irregularity, openness and indeterminacy rather than seeking to impose predetermined business principles of calculability, efficiency and predictability. Based on this, teaching acts - as they unfold - are not a reproduction of what took place in the past. They contain components of originality due to their distinct demands and how practitioners respond to them; therefore, they are irreducible and fall beyond the essentialism that forms the basis of Ofsted's EIF and other internal quality improvement mechanisms.

8.1.2.   Exploring transversal links

A complex system, as Cilliers (1998, viii) puts it, 'cannot be fully understood simply by analysing its components. Moreover, these relationships are not fixed, but shift and change, often as a result of self-organisation. This can result in novel features, usually referred to in terms of emergent properties'. However, the existing system of monitoring pedagogical practices puts an emphasis on management of performance and quantifiable outcomes in isolation rather than focussing on relational procedures and the interaction between different elements of the system. For example, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment policy at Northlands College states, [Learning Walks] are intended to be short temperature checks and to provide developmental feedback [however] this clause requires a degree of professional judgement and may be required to get a fairer/ more balanced sense of the lesson'. Learning Walks are perhaps useful to check on what is happening in class at a particular time but this 'temperature check' but the policy fails to recognise the complexities around contextual knowledge, learners' prior experiences, cultural capital and other material

conditions which make one classroom very different from another. A preference for a reductive approach therefore engenders a unified view of quality improvement policies and discursive practices whereby a linear approach is used to assess something that is inherently non-linear and complex. These conflicting demands pose challenges for both teachers and managers in the college. The consequence of such discordance is to view all practices in terms of symmetrical compliance whereby the actual process of teaching and learning and how it actually takes place is not as important as *how it is seen to be taking place.*

In the context of these potentially discrepant needs, individuals seek to reconcile their practices with accountability measures that are used to identify performance targets. Luke, for example, described the Ofsted criteria as a game that can be played well if you know the rules. He said he changes his teaching methods when his practice is monitored. The change would be instigated by his professional judgement of what is required by the inspectors rather than what he thinks is the best for his learners. He gave an example of embedding maths in his ESOL lessons by stating that:

> If I was doing something as tricky as quadratic equations, I would probably... create some kind of card sort for that or some kind of group activity even though I personally believe, it's not the best way to teach quadratics so therefore you could argue [students] are losing out. Because in reality what would be better would be for me to stand there, explain to them and get them to work together on a few worked questions but that would not get me a grade 1 or an independent result in my observation because the questions would be – why have you not got done any assessment for learning? Why have you not got students working together collaboratively; and the argument is because we are doing a topic that doesn't lend itself to that. But I wouldn't put myself at that risk. I would imagine something, think of something and create something that was sort of all singing all dancing even though I didn't believe in its merit really.

The technique Luke uses here works for him in terms of fetching the required outcomes, such as *Outstanding* or *Independent Development*, during quality inspections. He determines the 'best' form of teaching by incorporating the principles that are used as a means of exacting compliance. This

form of adaptation can ironically be used to show how things are rearranged in open systems via 'self-organisation' – one of the central features of complex systems. Luke was explicit in articulating teachers' ability to adjust their strategies and respond to the continual need to create conditions that appease their assessors.

> I think anybody could structure a lesson to be outstanding, but does that make them an outstanding teacher? Not really.

He discusses teachers' ability to control things to their advantage by 'playing the game' that he is expected to play for his audience. As a component of this system he has learned to handle the changes in his teaching space in a skilful manner. As Colliers (1998, p. 80) explains:

> [T]he capacity of complex systems which enables them to develop or change internal structure spontaneously and adaptively in order to cope with or manipulate the environment.

In the case of an unannounced learning walk or an unexpected change in their personal lives, a teacher may decide to abandon their lesson plan and respond to the demands placed on them by the changed situation. Here the interaction between teaching practices and the processes to assess those practices is constantly changing as a result of social externalities. Teaching practices become compatible with quality agendas when they are visible to an external gaze, but in other situations determine their own course of action by not conforming to all the criteria concerning the commonly accepted model of accountability. A teacher may, of course, decide not to change their delivery at all or change it in a slightly different way by modifying the content or readjusting the pace of the session. It becomes a matter of using the techniques required by the situation and if someone is good at doing that because of their knowledge and previous experience, changing certain aspects of their teaching - so it conforms to the commonly accepted view of quality improvement - is not going to be a problem. This is where the link between policies and practices becomes complex as it is dependent on so many different internal strands as well as external factors.

It is therefore this interaction between different parts of the system – such as student behaviour, whether the lesson is observed or unobserved, teachers' own motivation, their level of energy, their

feelings about and beliefs in the merits of quality systems and the existing criteria they are judged against – which makes it difficult to predict the impact of any teaching process. All of these aspects need to be looked together by taking a relational view rather than analysing them in isolation if the understating of the educational operation in FE is to be made possible. It is in this sense that teaching and learning practices at Northlands College are a non-equilibrium system.

8.2. Reimagining hierarchical relations: mixtures of resistance and compliance

Traditional conceptions of professional practices in FE involve the attribution of power to senior managers and an understanding of how managerial interventions encroach upon teachers' professional autonomy. This view has merit and, as we have seen in the previous chapter on neoliberalism in FE, it is established through evidence in literature that draws on marketisation of education. Nonetheless, we cannot assume that authoritative hierarchical relations always operate in a uniformed fashion in this context. The argument here is not to contradict that education policies and practices informed by neoliberal principles, analysed earlier, redefine professionalism in FE in terms of market-based control and accountability. My aim in this section would be to rediscover authoritarian relations which are comprised of new forms of power. The patterning of power is not automatic and predictable. It depends on a range of ecological factors as well as the type of interactions that take place at a particular time.

The argument is constructed upon a sharp dichotomy between polices, managerial initiatives and teaching practices. The key point, which is also analysed in the earlier section, is that in certain conditions a teacher that refuses to act with regard to the imposed quality standards may well be more compliant when they have to make aspects to their practice visible to another stakeholder inside or outside the classroom space. Alice stated that there was clash in priorities in a sense that what was important to her and the learners did not always match with the expectations in policies and how they were translated by senior managers.

> I think I'd say I am completely compliant but I don't think those are the most
> important things to be measuring really deep down and I don't think the students
> think they are either … tick boxes are just tick boxes, aren't they? We get two days'

notice [before audits and observations] and there are certain things that are requirements ... I do comply but I comply in my own way a lot of the time.

Alice was very clear about how to go about doing what is important for her and the students, and making adjustments to her practice in order to meet expectations. The first part of the statement is about compliance and how she fulfils the criteria but at the same time she is not convinced about its effectiveness in terms of her priorities as a teacher and what she thinks is best for her learners. She then mentions the two-day notice period which shows it's that time which gives her the flexibility to be compliant in her 'own way'. There are a number of important things here that require attention:

- Alice is aware that she needs to meet requirements but is not fully convinced that they are useful
- She is not always compliant
- When her practice is checked, she doesn't teach like she is 'in the prairies'. In other words, she brings her practice in line with the requirements.
- Her version of compliance is dominated by the micro-level top-down management

She is in charge of her classroom and runs her own show before the notice is received so the managerial model of education which requires ticking boxes does not influence her professional domain because she does not see them as significant at all. It is in this sense we need to reinterpret 'structure' in FE. The appearance of certain variance in her practice is unfolded through the interactions amongst factors encompassed in the following question:

- What is important and what counts?
- When is one thing more important than something else?
- What matters the most at different times?
- What needs to be changed?
- What does not need to be changed?
- How can dissent be expressed without confrontation?

As Mason (2008, p. 10) puts it, 'things emerge at particular points in the history of a set of multiple interactions through time, simply as a result of the interactions among constituent elements, rather

than as the result of 'deep', generative causal structures'. The interactions Mason is referring to are evident in this context and are determined by changes in space Alice situates her practice in, and how it interacts with the demands placed on her at different times of the year. As a result, her practice becomes consistent with the nature and history of a managerial need for monitoring, accountability and compliance but on her own terms.

While discussing observations, Deborah said that she was 'tempted to do what you normally don't do' and she did not find it easy; however, it was something she became good at eventually. She said,

> the lesson is you know a living organism. You can't really predict where it's going
> to go sometimes. and you can't really predict that with all the good will in the world
> that what you plan is perfect and if it is going to go very very well because you are
> dealing with people because there are various different issues that students come
> with to the classroom and sometimes students may need pastoral help.
> You understand more and more that it is a ticking boxes exercise so as years go by...
> you equip yourself with strategies to cope with planning so that you can tick the
> boxes that are expected of you to tick so this is how I cope.

This endorses the point Alice had made about the gap between what she normally does and how her practice becomes more compliant where it needs to. In this form of compliance, their practice undergoes radical transformations which requires acceptance to managerial directive. However, their practice differs significantly from the managerial discourse at other times when they have more time to respond to their students' emerging needs rather than worrying about 'ticking boxes'. It is at those times when teachers recognise that responsibility for a decision or a policy does not rest with those on senior management positions but with those who have greater authority and up-to-date pedagogical knowledge in the classroom. Deborah's point about the unpredictability in the classroom and how teachers deal with that by changing their strategies and becoming good at them when boxes need to be ticked highlights an approach that makes it possible 'to explain how individuals are on the one hand the outcome of social and historical processes and yet how on the other hand novelty, uniqueness and creativity are possible' (Olssen, 2008, p. 17).

What makes these transformations novel and creative is the process that changes in teaching practices as a result of external requirements when teachers are being observed and as a result of internal demands when they are more concerned about 'various different issues' Deborah mentioned. It is these views that teachers hold, how they embed certain discourses into their practice and how they strike a balance between the conflicting demands of the organisations and their learners' needs based on the situation they are in, which makes the exercise of professional discretion possible at teachers' level and results in the production of new subjectivities. The relationships in this sense are not straightforward and the process are not linear. There are no unified identities and no principles that can be called universal. It's about the differences and changes and reversing trends that assign fixed subject positions. In other words, it is about transversality and questioning commonly held beliefs as Foucault (1972, p. 200) puts it:

> If I suspended all reference to the speaking subject, it was not to discover laws of construction or forms that could be applied in the same way by all speaking subjects, nor was it to give voice to the great universal discourse that is common to all men at a particular period. On the contrary, my aim was to show what the differences consisted of, how it was possible for men [sic], within the same discursive practice, to speak of different objects, to have contrary opinions . . . in short I want not to exclude the problem of the subject but to define positions and functions that the subject could occupy in the diversity of discourse.

This Foucauldian approach helps us understand how Alice and Deborah on the one hand separate their professional practice from the demands of quality policies and yet on the other hand bring creativity in their practice by adjusting the process that enables them to tick boxes. What defines teachers' position and the way they function is the type of discourse they are operating under at a particular time in history. When they find themselves free of any managerial control, they do what they think is important in the classroom whereas render their practice more compliant when it needs to be made visible through quality assurance reporting systems.

8.3. Conclusion

The data explored in this chapter highlights issues linked with the complexity of teaching practices in the existing quality assurance apparatus in which the diverse nature of educational settings in FE is overlooked and sometimes ignored completely. By focusing heavily on meeting the required criteria at the classroom or the college level, the current mechanism does not cater for the factors stemming from the scale of complexity at other levels of dynamical systems. The role of these factors and how they may have influenced the process of teaching and learning cannot always be made evident in an hour-long observation in the classrooms and in a four-days inspection in colleges. A range of multiple variables interact with each other - in a dynamic and non-linear fashion - at different levels of the college environment. The implication of these connections and polymorphous relations for teaching practices can only be understood though a holistic and connectionist analytical perspective. The existing quality agendas designed to assess the quality of education are based on deterministic assumptions as they conceive that all educational practices should follow a linear, predictable and stable pattern and can be controlled from the inside. Through the use of illustrative data, this chapter raises questions about the application of a universal criterion in which quality of education is assessed in isolated pedagogical encounters. The selective compliance from the teachers provides an example of self-organisation and contributes to the explanation of emergence in teaching practices.

Assumed in the notion of 'compliance' is the view that when teachers meet certain standards or in Gabriella, Luke, Alice and Deborah's words are able to 'tick boxes', the quality of educational practices is good and if they are not, immediate interventions are required. What this view fails to take into account is the complexity of the given phenomenon in terms of how a practitioner can be a compliant and non-compliant at the same time and how they may exert professional autonomy and freedom whilst not openly challenging the rules of the game. As Foucault states, '"rules and freedom are not opposed to each other ... what is striking is the proliferation of possibilities by divergences" (1997, p. 122). One result of this possibility of divergence in this context becomes evident through the phenomenon of *documentisation* which I explain in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 9

9. A horizontal quality dispositif, 'documentisation' and multiplicity of power relations

9.1. The dispositif

The perspective taken in this thesis is premised on the idea that quality can be thought of as a discursive practice with its own disciplinary mechanism centrally concerned with the practice of observances focused on compliance rather than improvement of teaching practices. This chapter uses an approach which is relatively different to the existing ideas that either see observation practices as the only useful tool to check and improve teaching standards or a view wherein observations are to be understood as part of a carceral operation designed to govern teachers in a cruel fashion. Here, I wield a slightly different lens to explore the issue through the elaboration of Foucault's notion of 'dispositif' which enables us to view quality as a system; a system which is neither marked by oppressiveness nor an exemplar of good practice - it is a system of performance expectations. This analysis, I argue, puts forward a case study which examines the conception of quality and its inner workings in our times beyond these binaries. In other words, it is an analysis of quality improvement systems in Further Education in action, as it happens.

In this section, I seek to explain what 'documentisation' means and elaborate on the teaching learning and assessment processes that this conception entails. I draw attention to the complex sets of power relations teachers and senior managers are placed in and their role in the construction and maintenance of quality dispositif in FE. In recent years, there has been a need to focus on the relational nature of power relationships in the sector. I show how Foucault's conception of power – 'as a set of actions upon other actions' - and heterogeneity or multiplicity of points of resistance can help us focus on less obvious aspects of current quality improvement mechanisms (2002, p. 341). The FE managers and teachers, for instance, exercise forms of resistance which operate as an integral part of power; this warrants some further thinking on the conception of 'quality' in education and how it is recognised and practised. By attending to the levels of complexity and materiality in Foucault's analysis of 'biopower', this section introduces and explains the concept of

documentisation which, I argue, is currently the principal locus of quality improvement apparatus hence its exploration allows an elucidation of the nexus between policies and practices vis-à-vis the dispositif. The dispositif, in this context, can be conceived as a set of systems which devises, defines, executes, manages and at times reconfigures the terms of reference for the operation of quality mechanisms.

Foucault (1980, p. 194) explained the dispositif as follows:

> this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. Thirdly, I understand by the term "apparatus" [*dispositif*] a sort of – shall we say – formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need.

Foucault takes into account all entities – living and non-living, human and non-human, social and material, somatic and incorporeal, and how all of these miscellaneous components are linked with each other at any given point in time. He then looks at the mechanism used by that combination to address immediate necessities or obligations in those conditions. Those obligation can be real or made up for a specific purpose. Dispositif is that mechanism which is used to determine a particular course of action for particular necessities at a particular time in history.

Foucault refers to the whole complex structure of a social body in relation to his idea of the subject. The subject as an object of analysis; someone who is subject to other's control. The subject also develops their own knowledge and standards which are shaped by different discourses connected with social structures and practices the subject is placed in. There are very complex connections amongst various discourses, practices, relationships of the self and power relationships which define the organisational makeup of an institution and the rationalities regarding the knowledge it uses to define and justify its operation of power.

In the context of teaching and learning, it is a useful concept to analyse connections between material structures such as physical, administrative and financial resources, and knowledge structures in terms of how that organisation functions and runs its operations and social networks, forms its policies, displays symbolic expressions and employs its governing principles. The relation between the two is fluid and processual rather than fixed and stable; therefore, these links work to establish new power relations. In other words, it is a mechanism through which an organisation functions, but the arrangements within that mechanism are always changing. It presents a sequence of events that shapes teaching spaces wherein subject positions of teachers, curriculum leader and quality managers are always in the making. These shifting positions are a consequence of relations produced by specific types of knowledge. For example, how teaching practices are executed, controlled and quality assured cannot be understood without analysing how these practices are connected with dominant political discourses, regulatory bodies, government policies and issues of finance. Connecting what is said in policies to what is actioned and how it is actioned in pedagogical spaces helps us understand the effects of power relations as well as a series of strategies stemming from specific forms of knowledge.

It is in this sense dispositifs are mostly productive rather than oppressive; they produce new subjectivities, new ways of being, new ways of exercising power and new points of resistance. Dispositif is the operating manual of the order and management of the modern power. In the modern western world, power is not fixed, and it is not possessed by one person or a single section in an organisation; dispositifs create new regimes of power by displacing the sovereign ruler and by replacing tyranny with governmentality and biopower. Dispositifs draw our attention to resistance which is not in opposition to power but in effect occasioned by it. In other words, the power of power depends upon resistance. It is in this sense that an analysis of dispositifs may show us how the subject can affect power relations rather than just being affected by them. The freedom of subjects enables them to resist operations of power by reworking them from inside rather than trying to move outside of those dispositifs. The key point is that resistance against certain dispositifs embraces the very dispositifs it is trying to counter with.

9.1.1.   Dynamic interplay of power relations

Each organisation has its own knowledge structures based around physical and socio-material connections created by power relations. In other words, power does not inhere in a single structure or an individual; rather, power relations are spread across in an institution or in a society. The interaction amongst things such as policies, emergent situations, judgements made on the quality of practices, decisions made on allocation of resources, division of workload and the changing positions of different agents in different situations results in 'a complex strategical situation in a particular society' (Foucault, 1998, p. 93). All of these elements are 'heterogeneous' because they change the nature and their manifestations in different times. That is precisely why it may not be a good idea to always look at the top of the structure or obvious hierarchies when we need to understand the way power functions in a particular situation. Therefore, in the context of this study the Principal, Vice Principals or a Head of Quality 'should not all be seen as a simple projection of central power' (Foucault, 1989b, pp. 201-207) Their power has its own constraints and limitations engendered by heterogeneous connections between senior managers, the Department for Education, Ofsted, teachers and their discursive practices.

One example of this is when a new Vice Principal at Northlands told teachers in his first address that they should not 'moan' in front of Ofsted inspectors because that moaning has implications for the overall grade a college gets. This is an important example that helps us understand the nature of power that comes from below in FE. Teachers don't get a grade for their lessons observed by Ofsted anymore; it is the overall judgement on quality of education that does not directly reflect judgements made on any single teacher or their performance. On the other hand, a poor 'Leadership and Management' grade could have an implication for a Principal and the other senior leaders – after all, there are only a handful of them.

Another example is Simon's who told me how he had learnt to articulate his opinions because of other stakeholders' position on particular subjects. He said:

I had to make sure learners' interests are protected and communities' interests are protected whatever shape of form. I used to be so passionate, I still am but I have learnt to control my passion to an extent because when I would see people who

didn't share my passion, I used to get really frustrated with them. I think I have
learnt not to express it. Not that it's not there...

Simon in this case is clearly not a sovereign head of the college. He is not even the hub of Northlands' power centre as his power is exercised in social relations. The fact that he 'controls' his passion is somewhat an admission that he is being obliged to do it because of the potential resistance to some of his policies and procedures he wanted to implement, and the undesirable affects they may produce.

Simon's passion does not always find an expression because he probably thinks that it needs to be brought in line with others' priorities and passion too. His relationship with his subordinates in the college is very important in this case because it is this relationship that dictates the operation of power. He is aware of what others think or feel about his passion and despite having the authority to employ the remit of his official position, he chooses to opt for a possibility that does not match with his line of thought. As Foucault (2000a, p. 337) puts it, 'if we speak of structures or mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power on others. The term power designates relationships'. The relationships are heterogeneous in a sense that they can be redefined in different times and situations according to the multiplicity of local social relations. Simon's conduct needs to be devoid of that 'frustration' he used to express; he seems to be aware that any new compliance initiative could lead to political backlash against his proposal. It is in this sense Foucault sees power defined by local politics and located in 'conditions of possibility', as opposed to the Principal's office (1998b, p. 93).

Simon also said that he knows that in some colleges, policies are not strictly followed because the staff in those colleges are 'quite flexible' and 'they don't mind'. However, with the strong Union at Northlands, he can't afford to have that flexible approach and wants people to be 'one hundred percent compliant'. Here he was referring to his senior managers who were not given an option to performance manage their team of teachers whenever they wanted to unless it was stated in the policy. For example, learning walks and observations can only take place at a particular time as stated on the Quality Calendar shared with all staff. This approach makes these observation practices acceptable for the Union as well as other teachers in the college. The key point here is that teachers'

expectation and the position that the Union takes is also part of the quality that informs the observation practices and the way they are executed.

The teachers are generally okay with observations and other compliance schemes such as audits when and if carried out in accordance with the policy and when they are being notified about them. When a teacher gets a notification 48 hours before their two-day observation window, the email sent to them states that one of their lessons will be observed during those two working days. The TLA policy with the observation criteria and a blank observation form is also sent with the notification email. Teachers then start preparing for those observations; it also becomes one of the main topics of conversation in staffrooms.

The teachers try and make sure that the observed lesson matches the criteria and five out of the six teachers said, implicitly or explicitly, that their observed lesson is somewhat different from their usual lesson. Luke and Gloria both used the same phrase – a lesson with 'bells and whistles' - to describe that observed lesson. Gabriella said that 'she played the game' in accordance with the expectations pronounced in the TLA policy; in other words, she did what she was asked to do without being entirely convinced about its rationality. This shows the way disciplinary power functions at Northlands – it is exercised by influencing teachers rather than by exerting force. As we have seen in the chapter 3 that there is a marked contrast between Bourdieu's perspective and Foucault's ideas on power and how the later has distinguished exercise of power from the use of force. We can see this form of power in action at Northlands as it subjects teachers to government through freedom.

We can see how the observation policy makes teachers such as Luke, Gabriella and Gloria change their practice and add those 'bells and whistles' which they otherwise would not. They are, of course, not forced to do it but they become subject of the exercise of power which is exerted through a mutually agreed 'dispositif' made up of connections between policy makers, unions, teachers, the actual polices, quality calendar and observation notification emails. The interaction amongst all these elements works to re-establish teachers' understanding of what their conduct in the classroom should be; they eventually end up acting according to the guidelines pronounced in the policy – this compliance may not be voluntary but it is a result of teachers' own free will. This is what Foucault means by 'an action upon action'. An ensemble of material and social and the local relationships lead

to the production of set of practices that are in line with the policy makers' intentions with slight modifications made to the process by the teachers. Teachers are not passive recipients in this operation; they are actively involved in the process and play their part in the construction of this despositif when it is enacted.

This version of compliance however is often not present in unobserved lessons, and that is not hidden from senior managers. Hector said that when he goes to observe teachers, they refer to students' individual targets, action plans and lesson objectives. However, when he speaks to the students in that class, they don't seem to know much about these things because practising these is not part of their classroom routine. He said:

> Targets is one thing I don't think happens you quite often when you go in and you
> doing an observation, you frequently hear people say always refer to your targets or
> you know where your targets are don't you? But actually, when you ask students,
> they don't. So those sorts of practices I don't think are happening on a regular basis
> because otherwise the students would know.

Hector's point endorses teachers' own view on this but teachers such as Charlotte and Luke think going through objectives and yellow cards wastes a lot of valuable class time. Yellow cards provide headings for what must be covered in each lesson in terms of learning outcomes and students' individual targets. These cards were put on the front wall of each classroom for teachers to write their lesson agenda on the white board. This was done for students as well as for any visitors to get a snapshot of what was going on in each lesson. In this case, it could be argued that teachers' exercise power in their practices in accordance with their knowledge and what they believe is useful in their class. This exercise of power is a form of dissensus which is also part of the operation or power.

'The exercise of power in this sense requires and presupposes the "freedom" of the subject acted upon… [Power] is productive [as it] produces new fields of possibilities' (Flohr, 2016, p. 42). It seems evident that this freedom not only allows teachers to define their own conditions of possibility, but also senior managers to exert power by making teachers adapt their practices when they are being observed. One needs free subjects to exercise power - freedom in this context has its own

conditions. This is why the existence of freedom predefines the operation of power, and this is why it is not an oppressive operation designed to punish teachers with enforcement of regulations and make them obedient. Power here denotes freedom rather than coercion, and the conditions of freedom represent power that is dispersed across the social body of Northlands and its contemporary dispositif (Foucault, 1997a) which creates the requisite conditions for documentisation - enabling teachers to produce different types of practices for specific purposes on different occasions.

9.1.2.   Conditionality of inequality and power-knowledge relations.

I do not suggest that teachers and senior managers have equal power and status. The college structure is based on neoliberal principles. It is run like a business and frequent references are made to profits and losses and the use of business vocabulary is not unusual. As Gloria highlighted students are now referred as customers. The Northlands staff were made to attend a day-long customer services training delivered by a company that advertises its main aim as 'creating better service in businesses' on its website. A few teachers in that training stood up and voiced their exasperation with the trainers because they found the content - around 'smiling at and being friendly with 'customers'' - quite condescending. This is an example of how senior leaders who organise these trainings can at times be so out of touch with their own local context.

Teachers are not involved in education policy making. Therefore, the idea is not to deny that policy makers and senior managers are able to exercise their power in a more visible fashion and with more compendious effects. Nonetheless, when we examine the conditions of those apparent inequalities, it becomes evident that power is not centralised at Northlands; it is not located in the Principalship. In fact, it is not located anywhere or at one place, and it is not possessed by one person or one group as it used to be the case in the sovereign models of power.

One example of how the balance of power has now swayed from managers to students can be seen in the changes made in the 2019 EIF. The Quality Unit at Northlands have also changed their observation policy to bring it in line with the new Ofsted policy. In one of the joint observations with the Head of Quality, a Curriculum Manager disagreed with the judgment because they thought the teacher had met the new criteria and should be identified as 'independent'. The Head of Quality was adamant that the lesson was not good because four students were not supported promptly and as a

result did not make enough progress, whereas the Curriculum Manager referred to the criteria which stated that 'majority of (not all) learners' should be making progress over time (not necessarily in the same lesson). This disagreement delayed the decision, and it was referred to the Vice Principal and an independent consultant who had come to help the college with observations. The Vice Principal initially wanted to put their weight behind the Quality Head, but the independent consultant made their position clear by supporting the decision that favoured the teacher. Finally, they both agreed that the teacher had met the criteria according to the new shift in policy. The Head of Quality - who had initially chosen to look at the teacher's previous history of coaching and to use his own understanding of 'good teaching' rather than observing the lesson in light of the existing criteria – was told to change his decision in favour of the one which put the teacher in the 'independent' category. This incident shook the balance of authority and showed how in the existing dispositif power was decentralised, how subject positions changed and how practices and procedures are constantly in a state of flux. The multidirectional nature of power relations elucidates its relationship with knowledge. How different agents wanted to use their knowledge to structure and justify their actions by interpreting the same lesson differently shows that different power relations intersect in a number of ways; this may also indicate different intentions of different actors.

To understand the different intentions of these factors, the exercise of power must be viewed as relational. Northlands College is a grade 3 college in terms of its Ofsted ratings. One of the implications for that grade is that the college must take robust actions to improve its quality of teaching. A stringent observation policy at the college level is required to do this. However, this year the college was told by one of its interim Vice Principals that the outcome of observations in the college last year did not reflect that the grade 3 (requires improvement) status of the college. For example, in previous observations around 85% teachers were identified as 'Independent', 12% needed 'Supported Coaching' and only 3% needed 'Intensive Coaching' as there were some serious concerns about their teaching. Hector was of the view that this is because some observers were not making the correct judgments and more teachers needed to move from the 'Independent' to 'Supported' or 'Intensive' category. This is also thought to be important from the Ofsted point of view because Ofsted inspectors want to know how a college that 'requires improvement' or is 'inadequate' is tackling its poor teaching and what measures are in place to improve this. Based on

this rationale, if 85% of teachers are 'good' in a college such as Northlands, the self-assessment and quality improvement mechanism is not going to get Ofsted approval.

It is in this sense that different people with different types of knowledges may develop different intentions and aims in this complex matrix of power relations. Knowledge and power are inseparable, and the very existence of power is supported by knowledge. Foucault's use of the term *le savoir-pouvoir* (power knowledge) also needs to be understood in this regard; the operation of power is interlaced with knowledge; that is, power and knowledge create, modify, maintain and endorse each other in certain situations. This is to serve specific purposes in accordance with the intentions that are shaped by current demands. Thus, the exercise of power is neither top-down nor egalitarian; the multiplicity of power relations produces effects that are multidimensional. There is no absolute knowledge spelled in quality improvement and TLA polices that defines 'good' or 'bad' teaching; the quality 'real' is context dependent. Foucault's archaeology helps us see how the notions of 'truth' and 'self-evident' in this case are historically contingent and his genealogical analysis helps us grasp the interactions between knowledge and power as well as how these two are inextricably intertwined.

9.1.3. Shifting constellations of power and resistance

Gabriella, in both interviews, came across as a happy, compliant and dedicated teacher who loves all aspects of her job. However, there was also a sense of dissidence against processes implemented by Quality, so sometimes she does not do what she is told to do. She explained the details of her counter-conduct and gave examples a number of times in her interviews. For Foucault, resistance is a requisite for exercise of power. As he puts it:

> If there was no resistance there would be no power relations, because it would be a
> matter of obedience. You have to use power relations to refer to the situations where
> you are not doing what you want. So, resistance comes first.

> (Foucault, 1996b, p. 386).

Gabriella was very clear about situations wherein she was *not doing* what she wanted as well as instances where she *was doing* what she wanted.

> I love the paperwork we have to do [but] ... some of the paperwork, it really feels like I am just trying to, you know I am just providing evidence that I am doing... it really feels like an exercise I am doing for someone else.

Here she was talking about the audits done by the Quality Unit and how she was expected to include additional information that teachers were not expected to produce before. She gave an example of Course Profile documents which traditionally contained essential information about students but now there was an additional column for 'teaching strategies' and 'stretch and challenge' strategies for each individual in her class. She said that writing all of those things was 'very time consuming' and neither she nor her students benefited from it. That 'someone else' in her last sentence was perhaps a reference to people responsible for doing the quality check. In that respect the pointlessness stems from the need to modify her practice in order to bring it in line with the demands of the quality gaze which is external. This gaze is the product of a certain type of knowledge that subjects Gabriella to quality regulations but does not penetrate her. It is not internalised because she is not convinced about the benefits. She then gave another example of the type of 'pointless' tasks with little or no pedagogical value:

> There was a column in that Scheme of Learning which is something like reflection or something. I don't wanna reflect on my scheme of learning. I don't want to go into my scheme of learning and write notes. It is very time consuming and pointless, so I took that column out of my scheme of learning and that has been noticed. But I am not the only teacher who did it. My scheme of learning isn't a reflecting document.

In this instance she was talking about a new section in Schemes of Learning in which teachers were expected to write their weekly reflections in addition to providing an outline of the course for each week. This point is very suggestive as it includes an account of her counter-conduct and what she does when she is not entirely convinced about something - she does not comply. This is an example

of how complex disciplinary activities such as reflection are depersonalised and de-situated. Reflection as a bodily activity is meant to belong to the person who is reflecting, in such a way that their careful thoughts come directly from their mind. However, teachers in this case face the paradox of having to tabulate their reflection for a specific purpose. Therefore, they complete these tasks for the sake of compliance in an automated fashion without seeing any point in doing them. This is documentisation in action.

She also mentions that when she took the column out, it was noticed by Quality. By taking that column out, in fact Gabriella reconfigured the terms of power relations. There are three actions that require our attention in this case. First is the inclusion of new sections in planning documentation, secondly, many teachers' refusal to complete those sections as Gabriella said that she was not alone in doing that. Finally, Quality noticing this non-compliance. The exercise of power is initiated in the initial action and then it is in the response of the teachers where we locate resistance. Resistance then generates the follow up response from Quality which is conveyed through their audit feedback. Gabriella and other teachers' reaction may not be an obvious example to show how teachers exercise power, but it definitely is an integral part of process through which power relations determined their course of actions. It is in this sense Foucault defined power as acting on actions and why there would be no power if there was no resistance (Flohr, 2016).

This, however, is an example of just one type of resistance. The manifestations of resistance at Northlands takes many forms including the ones that are more subtle but active in the sense that they are capable of influencing the power relations. For Foucault, resistances are not 'only a reaction or rebound ... that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat' (Foucault 1998b: 96). The other form of resistance evident in teachers' practices is when they govern their own conduct by actively engaging with the quality improvement schemes. Nonetheless, this 'engagement' is an aspect of their working behaviour situated in the arrangements indicated on the Quality Calendar of the college. For example, Alice did not agree that teachers do not get enough time to 'prepare'. She said that she is always aware when things are going to take place in the college as is everyone else, so there is always plenty of planning time.

> People that say they can't plan, not really. I don't know why they say that because we do get a notice and they should be in order. if we get 2 days' notice they should have things roughly in order particularly if they know that that notice is going to come. And they have known that since September. So, if the notice comes in February, then they've had 4 or 5 [months] to prepare.

Here Alice is talking about IQRs (Internal Quality Reviews) that always take place around February. Alice engages with the process by keeping her paperwork 'in order' and expects that others do or should do the same. This is exactly the same phenomenon of materialising practices for the sake of compliance as we saw in Gabriella's case and how she was not happy about materialising her reflection in a specific way for a specific purpose. As long as a sample of work is carefully documentised for audits and observations, all is well.

What she is not saying here - but is clearly obvious – is that the purpose of these reviews is not that teachers improve their practices and use their developmental points to improve the quality of their teaching on a permanent basis. The idea is that teachers 'plan and prepare' for audits and observations and then show the required markers when their work is scrutinised. The aim of these quality reviews then becomes what many teachers describe as 'box-ticking' exercises with little or no impact on day-to-day teaching practices. In other words, teachers carry on with their usual practice apart from the sessions that are observed and the work that is being audited. Practices that need to be made available for an actual or disembodied 'observation', they 'plan' and 'prepare' in order to meet the criteria.

This aspect of their practice highlights self-regulation. These 'technologies of the self' construct a self which is not only a product of the quality dispositif, but also disrupts it by only modifying a small part of their work which needs to be 'presented'. Teachers carry this operation on their very own bodies by modifying their conduct in order to attain a certain state of perfection (compliance in this case) when they deem it necessary. It is these types of adjustments and management of the self which is described as governmentality by Foucault. The point related to the dichotomy between 'observed' and 'unobserved' practices is an important point and calls attention to the role and purpose of quality improvement policies in their totality. The idea behind quality reviews and

inspections is to improve the quality of education in its entirety. The feedback and judgements after observations are based on a snapshot of work which was 'rehearsed' but in actual fact conveys a sense of wholeness in relation to the quality of teaching at individual, departmental and the college level. The type of compliance demonstrated by teachers in this case has a creative non-compliance embedded in it. This non-compliance however does not subvert or disrupt quality schemes; it resists by transforming and contributing to the inherent common sense contained in the contemporary dispositif. The new meanings produced by such refusals work to reshape the initial logic in quality improvement agendas, and they outline the new forms of compliance which does not get a formal mention in reports and policies but 'unmakes' the common sense authored in those documents. Thus, this is the 'unsaid' part of Foucault's definition of dispositif – something this study untangles in the context of connections between policies and practices in Further Education.

Another example of these creative strategies of compliance can be found in Luke's account of the marking and feedback audit. He explained how he engages with the process, but his engagement exploits the limits of policymakers' knowledge that seeks to determine the conditions of a teaching and learning space at Northlands. Luke made an interesting point about 'box-ticking' and said that it is not just managers, teachers also become box tickers themselves.

> [Quality] run a session on marking and feedback for example and [then they] run an audit on marking and feedback. And then [they] are doing the audit and giving the feedback back. What I would suggest is that teachers are … just box ticking. They are then the box tickers. They've created some boxes for me to tick, I am gonna take a selection of books home, I'm gonna mark them in the way that they've told me in the training, then I'm gonna bring them in, I am gonna give them in and they're gonna do the audit.

What he means is that teachers are given information in training sessions about what constitutes good marking and feedback practice. He also emphasises the idea of a sequence of activities in which teachers go with the flow after making a start. Each step in every activity forms a part of a whole dispositif which would otherwise be incomplete in its current forms without these 'ticks' being used

to tick checklists in the entire process. They use this checklist to adjust their work before sending it for the audit during IQRs. He explained this point:

> That's the teachers then box ticking... And to believe that because that training happened, it's then happening, is naïve. But I don't think it's that naïve. I believe senior managers know it's not happening even after all that, but they've ticked their box and say, 'we've delivered that training'. So that's them ticked, then it's up to the teacher to follow up with what they've been told to do. The teacher hasn't followed up or the teacher then thinks well this audit is coming up, I'd better take a load of books home and mark them. Is that ongoing meaningful feedback? No, it's not because it's all done over one weekend and that goes for everything that happens within the organisation. ... I believe that the training sessions that are delivered are excellent, but the point is that the teachers are not then delivering them in the spirit that they should be delivered in. They're delivering them sort of 'oh that audit is coming up'.

He said it was mainly because of lack of time and sometimes teachers had too many students. FE teachers are not given a 'free period' for marking or planning time as their counterparts who teach in schools are. There is a lot to unpack in what Luke said in the above quote in terms of the exercise of power as an action on an action. For example, the marking and feedback audit notice received by a department is the initial action taken by Quality; the teachers' action then follows from it by not only bringing itself in line with the expectations (said and unsaid) set out in the notification, but also exercising new possibilities of action.

As discussed in previous chapters, the Quality department uses the 'traffic light approach' to feedback whereby red denotes poor, amber shows 'okay' and green represents 'good'. The teachers put in the green category are not asked to provide samples of their feedback again in that academic year. In order to stay in the green category, as Luke describes it, teachers only need to take students' books home for a weekend and provide feedback on students' work using the WWW/ EBI (What Went Well/ Even Better if...) framework so it can pass the quality check. The feedback on students' work on this occasion is not for students but written for Quality. The level of resistance determines

the follow up action. For example, 'red' and 'amber' would show non-compliance and therefore will be subject to further scrutiny in the next phase. Different levels of resistance will make the exercise of power change its course of action accordingly.
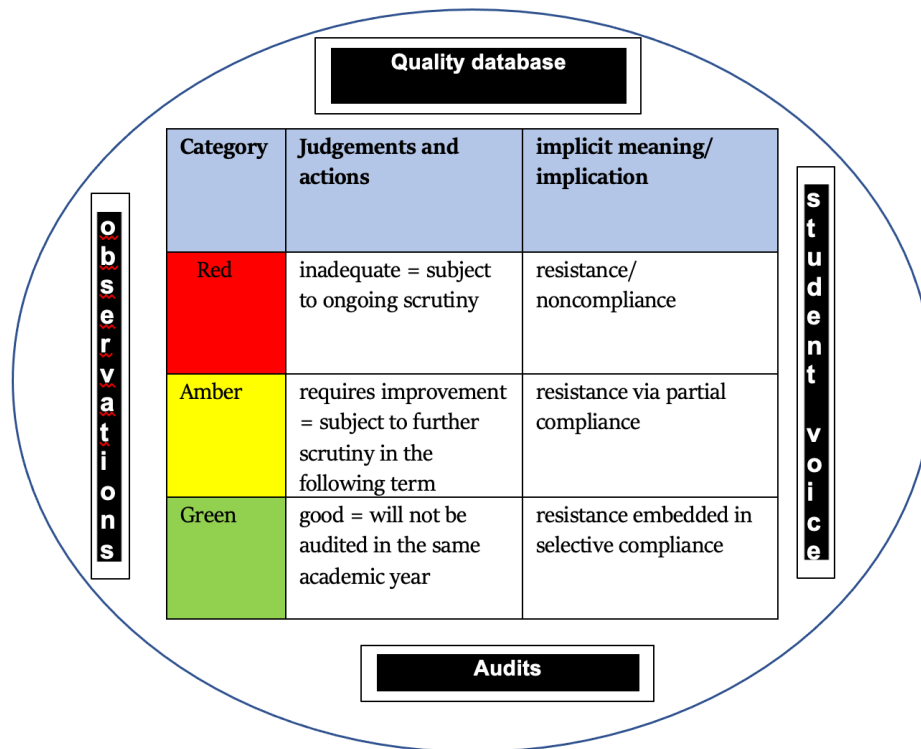

Quality database

Category	Judgements and actions	implicit meaning/ implication
Red	inadequate = subject to ongoing scrutiny	resistance/ noncompliance
Amber	requires improvement = subject to further scrutiny in the following term	resistance via partial compliance
Green	good = will not be audited in the same academic year	resistance embedded in selective compliance

observations

student voice

Audits

Figure 4: Quality judgements based on triangulation model (Z. Naz)

However, my focus here is on the act of resistance embedded in green category which in some cases may not be intentional on the part of teachers. This version of resistance does not constitute refusal or rejection; it simply makes the exercise of power determine its next action or no-action in this case. Resistance in this case is 'presupposed in the exercise of power [and is] premised on the initial field of possibilities constituted in the exercise of power' (Flohr 2016, p. 48). In other words, teachers act within the possibilities offered by the scope of marking and feedback audit and play their part in the maintenance of power relations by incorporating resistance, which is marked by compliance rather than subversion. The politics of quality improvement schemes here implies that resistance 'is not a matter of rejecting or denying power, but by engaging and modifying its contemporary configurations through that very same medium: resistance *through* power rather than resistance to power' [emphasis in original] (ibid, p. 48).

Luke, who is highly critical of quality agendas at the college, himself admits that the training sessions are 'excellent' but they do not generate the impact intended by architects of quality schemes. He does not oppose the rationale behind them. In fact, here he critically analyses teachers' role, and his examples feature heterogeneity of complex relation between teachers, the Quality Department, audit notification emails, quality calendar and the audit mechanism at work in the college. Teachers conveniently plan their actions using the very same approach that is used by quality managers who are responsible for having these audits and observation systems in place before inspections. Luke explained this through a juxtaposition of senior managers and students:

> ...senior managers for example have just become good at passing inspections just like students become good at passing exams rather than being able to demonstrate that they have got the necessary skills to actually do a job. They are just trained to pass exams. I think teachers now are just trained to pass inspection... It is about training teachers to be Ofsted ready rather than training teachers to be good teachers.

Teachers, students and senior leaders are all part of the same mechanisms and they 'play the game, as Gabriella had described it. Teachers are able to change the direction of actions - taken by Quality – acted upon their own actions by manoeuvring the system and their resistance exists within the arena of power relations. The subtlety of resistance in this constellation of power relations results in reconfiguration of the power exercised over its objects. Therefore, power is productive rather than oppressive. As Foucault puts it:

> We cannot jump outside the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it. So what I've said does not mean that we are always trapped ... there is always the possibility of changing

> (Foucault, 1997b, p. 167).

The type of resistance is evident in teachers ticking boxes rather than demonstrating an actual and permanent change in their marking practices. Teachers are able to play their cards well if they know

what is expected of them in terms of how the notion of 'quality' can be demonstrated during quality checks as opposed to how it should be used to improve their work. The fact that teachers have a choice to exercise their options by using their knowledge shows their actions are brought about by the multiplicity of the same operation of power that seemingly intends to exercise control over the quality of their work. It is in this sense that Foucault rejects the conception of power without resistance and consequently refutes the 'trapped' argument because the exercise of power can be modified and changed from within. Teachers like Luke, Alice and Gabriella do not aim to subvert the power exercised over them; they exploit the field of possible actions and their counterpower engenders a different type of resistance which aligns with the power that seeks to quality assure their work.

The re-customisation of power relations evident in how observations, inspections and audits are passed and how teachers embed their resistance in their counter-conduct to *show* improvements instead of embracing the very principles rooted in quality improvement polices helps us reconceptualise the stated purposes of observations and audit exercises. The exercises of quality assurance find their expression in the enactment of producing 'evidence'. Producing that evidence involves teachers using their agency to plan their actions by *documentising* their work for quality checks so it conforms to the expectations of the gatekeepers of quality. These conscious efforts take place within the network of local power relations and are premised on phenomena of verification and attestation. The resistance is also part of the operation of power and precludes the possibility of non-compliance. It is in this sense that the system of quality improvement is based upon documentisation – a concept which could be interpreted as an antonym of actualisation.

9.1.4.   Governmentality of the Self

The existing predominant approaches to observations and audits either view them as performance management exercises to control teachers or a tool to improve the quality of teaching by identifying areas for development teachers need to work on and use for their CPD. These finalities place quality processes in permanent categories as if they were incapable of producing new formations and subjectivities. The static codifications create an illusion of power relations whereby teachers are either passive receivers of regulatory initiatives or they are active participants whose quality of work is premised upon their actions they can take freely. However, the intricate nature of power relations

and disparate points of interactions between human agents and materialities indicate a different kind of split between the aforementioned views and the possibility that things could be otherwise. Some of these possibilities become apparent when people use different strategies to 'govern' themselves. For example, Deborah has her own plan of action that manifests a different philosophy in which the subject is more active through the governmentality of the self:

> I have to raise my game year by year and take part in different developmental events
> ... see what other teachers do [to] improve my practice.

The strategies mentioned here constitute attending CPD sessions and taking part in peer observations. These activities are not outside of the quality dispositif, but in this case their actualisation is voluntarily enacted by the subject herself. Deborah's desire to raise her game is intentional and results in the appropriation of quality improvement agendas through an operation performed to transform her own conduct. This operation on her own body is carried out to change her professional way of being in order to attain a certain state of 'quality' demanded by the system. Deborah's initiative is discursive in that it is connected with a particular form of knowledge that is part of the given dispositif. It is within the context of this practice that Foucault discusses a more active self and raises questions on the one-sidedness of a model of power which is predominantly ruling and oppressive. As Foucault puts it:

> If I am now interested ... in the way in which the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, by the practice of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed upon him by his culture, his society and his social group
>
> (1991, p. 11).

Deborah's act could be seen as a survival strategy which is the product of the same discourse, which she is very critical of. In this instance she takes a proactive role in the government of the self, taking her own initiatives as well as a passive object who embodies the dominant discourse which is

historically constituted and acknowledged in the existing dispositif. Peer observations are seen as good practice in the sector and used as an undisputed strategy often prescribed frequently in the 'Craft' models of teacher education. The traditions and norms of discursive practices dictate the subsequent conduct which is voluntary hence allows modification of the Self. It is in this sense that 'technologies of power' and 'technologies of the Self' are both in action concurrently

9.1.5.   Discourse of quality: materialities and emergence of new elements and meanings

The history of knowledge vis-à-vis the quality of teaching and learning in FE tells us that descriptions of 'outstanding' and 'inadequate' practices exist within a continuum that has been influenced by factors related to teacher performance. Physical spaces and materialities gain their significance from the construction and maintenance of discourses attached to them. For Foucault, it was not the buildings (prisons, clinics et cetera) that were important but the discourses of punishment and madness and social definitions of 'normal' and 'mad', associated with these material things, which needed attention. As Foucault highlighted the importance of prisons, machines and dungeons in relation to the discourse of 'punishment', the discursive materialities such as lesson plans, schemes of learning, course profiles, audit spreadsheets and inspection reports carry meaning because of the discourse of 'quality'. These documents have always played a pivotal role in defining the conditions of teaching practices as well as in the formulation of responses to those practices; for example, these responses take a form of judgements and put quality of education in a classroom, department or a college in respective categories and grades. The so-called grades from 1 to 4, categories such as 'independent development', 'requires supported coaching', 'requires intensive coaching' or traffic-light colour coding has been informed by how teachers plan and deliver their lessons. The 2019 EIF however changed the observation criteria by shifting the emphasis from teacher centredness to making it more student focussed. When I asked the principal about what he thought an outstanding provision or an outstanding lesson meant, he said:

> If you had asked me maybe 4, 5 years ago, I would say yes there's an outstanding
>
> lesson. But I think I am of the view that you can't necessarily describe a lesson as
>
> outstanding because it's more to do with the experience of learners... But you do

need to make sure that a lesson has got the basics that should be there from a teaching, learning and assessment point of view so the learning is taking place, learners are making good progress over time which is a big thing at the moment isn't it?

Simon accepts that his definition of 'outstanding' has been modified. In the first part of the statement, he denies that any lesson could be described as outstanding and then comes up with a list of 'basics' which only includes points that are linked to learners and learning. There is no mention of teachers' planning or delivery. This is quite a shift. Before 2019, it would not have been possible for Simon to describe an outstanding lesson by precluding the role of the teacher.

Hector's response to the same question was no different:

An outstanding lesson on its own is not really the important thing. it's about ... students experience overtime and what we might say is outstanding or requires improvement sometimes from a student's perspective is quite different. So...an outstanding lesson is one that students are learning and they're enjoying their learning, I think.

The current conception of what outstanding teaching constitutes, as stated by the college Principle and the Head of Quality and Improvement, thus appears entirely premised on and limited by the new Inspection Framework which privileges learner experience over teacher performance. The new descriptions indicate the changing dimensions of the discourse which has moved in accordance with the circulation of power. The fact that learning is only identifiable through physical manifestations such as questions, responses, feedback, tasks, marks and other contributions in speaking and writing activities indicates an extension of the techniques of governmentality. In this instance, having disciplined the teacher's body, the new Framework seeks to discipline the teacher's mind as well as the learner's expressions. Teachers are now self-regulating without any observer's presence in physical teaching spaces. They frame their practice in accordance with the prescribed criteria so at a later stage when their feedback examples are audited or when their students articulate their

learning experiences in forum meetings or during 'deep dives', that would be seen as a disembodied representation of a particular teacher being disciplined.

The 2019 EIF is part of the discursive formation that dictates 'the statement' of the present in FE. Both senior leaders formulate their statement on the basis of what Ofsted believes should be the correct interpretation of good teaching in 2020, which of course is very different from how it understood teaching prior to March 2019. However, it is not separate from the historical process of 'observation' and the purpose they have been used for.

> Discourse, in this sense is not an ideal, timeless form that also possesses a history;
> the problem is not therefore to ask oneself how and why it was able to emerge and
> become embodied at this point in time; it is, from beginning to end, historical – a
> fragment of history … posing the problems of its own limits (Foucault, 1972, p. 117).

The definitions of good teaching have changed but the archaeology of the current understanding, spelled out by two senior managers, tells us that it is part of the same process that has historically been used to gather information about teachers, managers and institutions at different levels. At teachers' level, it used to be the teaching methods a teacher employed in the classroom that informed judgements, but now it is about learners' views that are key to the whole process.

Although the rationality of gathering information about what 'goes on' in a classroom and then quantifying the effectiveness remains the same, the methods of execution have changed. It is in this sense that Foucault describes emergences such as these as fragments of history. These fragments are not outside of the discourse in question, they are rather inherent and 'possess a history'. The emergence of learner centredness in relation to judging the quality of education is the result of interactions between the discursive (pedagogy in this case) and the non-discursive (neoliberal policies) which represents a shift in emphasis, but at the same time maintains power relations in terms of its core purpose linked to accountability and measurability. This perspective draws from a business rationale and focuses on the production of particular types of practices in a measurable fashion, thereby it does not take into account the complex nature of educational practices in toto.

The last part of Foucault's statement above is about new limits linked to fresh elements in the discourse; this could be examined in relation to the inclusion of the phenomenon of learner experience in the new policy. The focus on learners being able to articulate their learning also draws our attention to the changing dynamics of power relations. Students are now the key stakeholders in the process of classroom observations and college inspections in terms of the grade a college gets or the type of outcome for the teacher. This is a new form of power which has its own constraints. For example, Ofsted's reconceptualization of good teaching requires teachers not only teaching the subject but also making learners learn about learning, and teaching them meta-cognitive strategies. Teachers have to train their students to list their learning points in front of an Ofsted inspector or an internal observer. Some learners will remember, and some will not; some learners will be able to do it better than others; some teachers will be able to do it better than others, and some inspectors will frame the questions to capture the quality of learning in a way that is significantly different from their fellow inspectors. The complexity of these elements however is not going to reflected in the final narrative that justifies a grade. Consequently, the key point is that the resulting judgments can then not be separated from the situated uniqueness of particular teaching practices. The effects of this new form of power relations will be dependent on 'alea' (chance) and the types of tactics teachers, inspectors and students use in this game. Indeed, it is a complex game whose end-results cannot be predetermined despite intense preparations.

It was interesting that Simon did not show any reluctance when he started talking about an 'outstanding' college unlike his response to the question about outstanding teaching.

> ...when I say to staff that we want to become an outstanding organisation I don't
> mean it from Ofsted terms, and I have said it as well. I just think we need to
> define our own outstanding criteria. For me it would be learning becoming good
> citizens, getting a job, getting into careers that they enjoy and having successful
> lives. I think for me it's important if we can do that.

Simon puts himself on the defensive and finds it necessary to justify his position by trying to distance himself from Ofsted. However, he does not do it well because he describes exactly what Ofsted are looking for in a college. The reason he does not hesitate in describing the characteristics of an

outstanding organisation could be because Ofsted still grade colleges. Nonetheless, they have stopped grading individual lessons. Therefore, the Ofsted definitions of an outstanding college are no secret and that makes people like Simon and Hector describe them with confidence. The absence of a grading criteria for individual lessons makes the two senior leaders quite hesitant when they are asked about 'outstanding' lessons, but they do provide a similar answer based on the essence of the guidelines for effective teaching ostensibly centred around learner experience. In the light of Foucault's archaeological tools, politics is this context has not only impacted how teaching and learning is defined, but also it has played an active part in the conditions of emergence of acceptable or outstanding teaching practices.

Teachers on the other hand included a lot of teaching strategies and methods around planning and assessment for learning when they were asked the same question about outstanding teaching. This gives an example of why it is not an individual's personal identity such as gender or age that is important, but their position in a system and the practices inform their concepts about the things surrounding them. 'Hence to understand a particular individual we must understand the patterns of their socialisation, the nature of their concepts, as well as the operative norms and conventions that constitute the context for the activity and the origin of the concepts utilised' (Olssen, 2014, p. 13). It also shows how different subjects assign meaning to different types of materialities and how their level of importance changes. For example, for senior managers now it is the feedback given on students' work and how that shows students' long-term progress is crucially important. Students' books on the other hand were not mentioned by teachers', and unlike Simon and Hector, teachers included lesson plans, schemes of learning and course profiles in the list of material things linked to their practice.

From this perspective, we can understand why Foucault did not reduce the conception of discourse to language. Language is, of course, part of the discourse but it is the way different discursive rules and the interaction of human and material entities redefine the meanings of the same language items that is more important. We have seen this exemplified in how the meaning of outstanding practice have changed over time. The change is not based on any predetermined pedagogical principle but rooted in the reasons that are political as well as historical and embedded in local context.

9.1.6. An atomistic approach of labelling practices

Another issue with the mechanism of assigning categories, such as outstanding, to practices is that it is designed to analyse aspects of the TLA system separately. Although Hector and other quality leaders say that quality reviews are based on triangulation of evidence, the tools to capture that evidence are not designed to adapt dynamically in accordance with the emergent changes in the system. For example, the triangulation exercise would involve putting together lesson observation reports, information from student fora, planning documentation and samples of teachers' feedback during the quality audits and reviews. This interlinking of data is useful and perhaps a more reliable way of analysing quality of education rather than just looking at teaching in one particular session. However, it fails to consider some of the constant changes in the environment that take place as a result of unpredictable interactions amongst its elements.

For example, Gabriella talked about the subject of 'outstanding' practice and said that 'outstanding teachers are probably not outstanding when they are being observed', because

> the emphasis is on the learner. Is the learner learning. It is far more on is learning
> happening then on what is the teacher doing I believe which unnerves me...
> because wow, that is so out of your planning control as well.

The actions of teachers will be dictated by students' apparent and immediate contributions in the classroom. Students' level of engagement with the content and their responsiveness will depend on various factors linked with their mental states and social realities and analysing the possible preconditions of learning may well be beyond teachers' control. Student feedback is also either taken quietly in the lesson or outside in a student forum with a senior manager or a consultant with no possibility of teachers contesting the data. Teachers cannot simply create the right conditions for learning in the classroom for all learners at all times. A lesson wherein a significant majority of learners are not fully engaged for a range of reasons could become their observed lesson and the books in which the feedback may be responsive rather than sequential could be the one chosen for audits or vice versa. Ultimately, an observer's adherence to a fixed criterion is likely to lump a teacher in the category that does not reflect what happens in that class on a day-to-day basis.

Gabriella mentioned the futility of planning schemes of learning for the whole academic year for ESOL students. This discussion was in the context of 2019 EIF and the emphasis on 'sequencing curriculum' which is likely to have a significant impact on the college inspection grade. She said schemes of learning are bound to change and teachers have to adapt them based on students' emerging needs. Language learning is not always about moving from simpler to more complex concepts in a linear fashion; acquisition of the target language components could be marked by chance (*alea*), incompleteness and complexity.

The other issue with the triangulation model used in this context is, as mentioned before, to do with learner training. Luke stated that responses collected from students in forum meetings and during classroom observations were about:

> How we, you know, we have to train students to give the correct responses to
> questions when inspectors come in – but is that really about educating them? It's
> not.

Therefore if 'learner voice' is separated from the level of teachers' contribution and effort in preparing their students to formulate correct responses, the resulting judgments could be considerably flawed. The connection between what learners say and how teachers prepare them to say what they say (or not) is not addressed in the course of the quality review process. The way a teacher starts preparing their learners from the beginning of their learning journeys will determine the outcome of an internal or external quality review. In complex systems, that is how changes and modifications in initial conditions lead to major changes in the whole system (Cilliers, 1998).

We could suggest that the exercise of assessing teaching practices for quality assurance reasons are there to meet the demands of the necessary conditions defined in the major policies rather than the factors related with the local context with a view of relational representation. Central to such policies of teaching, learning and assessment is the episteme of neoliberalism that installs the quality dispositif requiring us to see teaching and learning processes from the point of view of calculated visibility. The model is thoroughly linear and demands the production of generalisable teaching

practices by employing documentisation. The grading and classification of practices is made possible through this knowledge expounded in policies. The materiality and historicity of the process therefore play a key role in prescribing the hierarchy of practices in today's FE sector.

The historical form of rationality around quality of education is not apolitical. The teaching and learning policies and practices need to be explored within a theoretical domain in which the issues of genealogies of power and governmentality can enable us to look differently at power relations and their link to the knowledge processes involved in the production of education.

9.1.7. Genealogy of the quality dispositif and the 'history of the present'

The previous section of this chapter uses this framework to analyse and uncover power relations at multiple levels across different institutional settings at Northlands College. The way teaching is regulated and assessed at Northlands is not a new phenomenon and is not limited to this one college. Quality agendas and the issues associated with them have been there for some time; however, one of the aims of this study has been to address those problems with a new set of questions and tools in order to unveil what may still be hidden.

This is what Foucault means by the history of the present. The discussion around policies and their use in relation to materialism enables us to view policies as an aspect of 'the political technology of the body', and the effects of them manifested in the instances of compliance and resistance. We have also looked at the gaps between policies and practices which are a result of teachers' refusals 'at the level of the body, against the very body of the' policies (Foucault, 1977: 30). As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, Foucault's analysis in *Discipline and Punish* is about prisons and prisoners and for him the issue is not that prisons are often cruel and unpleasant; his material analysis focuses on them as an instrument of power. This approach helps us conceptualise policies as an embodiment of a particular rationality informed by a political discourse of our times.

As we have seen before, Foucault's archaeology is concerned with 'espistemes' as knowledge structures that govern thoughts. We used this to analyse how policy makers think and talk about a subject, how policies are formed and where they get their intellectual legitimacy from. In other words, using archaeology as the study of existence in this context, we need to examine the discourse

of quality that assigns labels such as 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate'. This analysis highlighted in previous chapters that 'synchronic similarities across disciplines in the same time period were more apparent than diachronic similarities within disciplines over time' (Garland, 2014, p. 370). For example, the existing quality dispositif that generates aforementioned labels has more in common with the modern discourse of business and finance than it has with previous educational discourses. The analysis of neoliberalism in FE makes this clear.

However, as archaeology is used to explore the existence of epistemological structures and how they operate in modern-day FE, I use genealogy to study the emergence of new practices, definitions links and meanings and new ways of resistance at Northlands College. That genealogical analysis has enabled me to consider possibilities of different ways of thinking about the quality of contemporary teaching practices in Further Education. It is done by looking at emergences of different practices and connections as well as different modes of revolt at the level of the body as we have seen previously. To understand the present day real we must return to the questions Foucault asked:

> What is present reality? What is the present field of our experience? Here it is not a question of the analytic of truth but involves what could be called an ontology of the present, of present reality, an ontology of modernity, an ontology of ourselves.

> (Foucault, 2010, p. 21).

To understand the existing form of rationality in current practices, we need to be able to understand the historical trajectories of power relations and how they have evolved into the exiting common sense. For example, how the definition of 'outstanding' has changed in the new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework can help us problematise the present.

An Ofsted inspector, who was also an independent consultant, was invited to deliver a session for teachers on the key themes of the EIF on one of their staff development days. There was a strong backlash against some of the major changes in the policy documents. One of these changes is to do with 'differentiation' in the classroom. When teachers were told that they should not plan

differentiated learning outcomes anymore and an introduction of the new content was not necessary in an observed lesson as revisions increase automaticity and fluency, quite a few expressed their outrage at the new position in relation to view Ofsted had taken in the past. One teacher said she was 'shocked' because many teachers in the past had lost their jobs because they did not fulfil the criteria in terms of differentiated delivery and learner progress in each lesson. In Luke's words, teachers are now expected to 'dance' to a different 'tune'. The reasons behind this sequence of changes are historical and how the balance of power has always been in a constant state of flux.

The descent of the existing quality dispositif is erratic and thereby enables us to use history to problematise the present. The changing logics have led to the emergence of different meanings of the same labels. This makes us think about another important point which is about the means of assessment that have not changed. For example, in the past differentiated outcomes were an integral part of a good or outstanding lesson; students needed to learn new things in each lesson and excessive teacher talk in the classroom was a discouraged. The expectation now entails planning the same learning objectives for all learners, creating opportunities for retrieval practice as opposed to new content for each lesson and facilitating learning through extensive teacher explanations. This makes it evident that definitions of good teaching keep changing and what is 'normal' today, will be assigned new meanings which may not be in line with the current standards.

However, the means of assessment and how good teaching is delivered have not changed much. For example, the way classroom observation, audits, student fora and quality reviews of planning and implementations are carried out are more or less the same. Ofsted now rely on 'deep dives'; they spend more time with students rather than managers. When I asked Simon about the purpose of deep dives and how they were different from previous inspection models, he said:

> I think deep dives really get you to the bottom, whereas previously when you
> were inspecting, you were looking at quite broad and generic view and you got
> an overall picture of what's going on. But I think when you are going down and
> looking to the level of analysis. For example, when a lead inspector says go and
> look at Media, so you just go and speak to students, you look at students' work,
> you try and look at every single thing so you are making quite a fair judgement

on that because it's not just touched on surface …. My leads have always been

like check your evidence, check your evidence. I think they just give you a fair

analysis of what's happening in that college, in that area as opposed to try and

look at the surface level if that makes sense. So, yeah, I think the purpose is quite

clear that you are being fair in your judgement and fair to learners and fair to

staff as a well.

An analysis from the point of view of a history of the present would look at the historical conditions of inspections and how teaching practices have been assessed and what they depend on now. What Simon said could imply that previous inspection Frameworks were not holistic and only scratched the surface of practices before making judgements. Additionally, they were not fair to staff and students. Of course, Simon did not say this, but without realising it he tried to promote the latest approach by undermining the previous models. Foucault states that a historical analysis of the political effects of an event or the statement involves letting 'knowledge of the past work on the experience of the present' (2008, p. 130). Constant focus on change keeps teachers in the deficit state of requiring improvement ad infinitum. The improvements are mainly to do with maintaining the status quo he, hence they result in constant anger amongst teachers about these policies.

By more critically linking 'deep dives' with previous inspection Frameworks more critically not only highlights the changing definitions of good teaching but also the changing balance of power. For example, the overall judgement at the end of an inspection will be more informed by learner experience rather than the data produced by the management. We have previously looked at how this enables teachers to train their students for inspections and sway the balance of power in their favour. Ofsted inspectors now engage more with different stakeholders such as students; the issue of student training for inspection makes it synonymous with engaging more with teachers because learners will be able to articulate their everyday learning experiences based on how they have been trained by their teachers to describe their learning trajectories. This is a new and often unremarked aspect of contemporary power relations that highlights the non-oppressive aspect of the existing structure by drawing our attention to the reciprocity of power relations. The shift of taking students' opinion and experience on board by educational authorities can be seen as an act of acknowledgement that learning is not always visible or capturable through observation of classroom

practices. Making learners and teachers speak of their curriculum is a specific form of observation which disciplines bodies in a different fashion by means of readjusting the dynamics of power relations.

The changes however are not fundamental because it is the specific ways of exercising power, or in other words techniques of discipline that have changed not the actual purpose - which is to assess the efficacy of teaching practices in terms of their measurability, provide accountability and promote competition. The core of these disciplinary practices is not 'to observe less' but to 'observe better'. Nonetheless an analysis around the issue of documentisation which is still in the heart of the contemporary quality dispositif raises many questions about the process and if it actually does what it says on the tin, or merely relies on producing documentary evidence which bears little resemblance to actual day-to-day practices. Foucault's genealogy unravels the appearance of contemporary disciplinary practices by illustrating the connections that are either never thought of or are considered insignificant.

9.2. Conclusion

A genealogical inquiry into teachers' current experience and managers' account of quality reveals how a regulatory apparatus is constructed on the notion of reductionism. The quality dipositif is not just based on classroom practices and what is stated in policies. A range of things discussed in this analysis, which are not thought to be directly linked with the effectiveness and effects of observations of teaching, play a significant part in how practices unfold and how they are perceived by observers and auditors. It is these changing power relations, complex processes in and outside the classroom, and the whole ensemble of social and material bodies, that shapes the contemporary quality dispositif.

Our present experience of quality involves making learning more evidence-based, more measurable and creating a mechanism in which making the impacts of teaching visible is more important than the teaching itself; putting evidence of learning on display takes precedence over the actual process of learning. It is not just poor teaching that is an issue; teaching that results in unobservable learning is also seen as part of the problem. Good practice needs to be *seen* to be taking place and people need to *talk* about it. It is this process through which practices are presented for audits and observations I refer to as *documentisation*. The operation of quality improvement in FE is more concerned with quality assurance of evidence rather than improving day-to-day practices. This specific conception of objectivity insists on regulating teaching practices in a way that makes them compliant rather than creative, atomistic rather than holistic; it measures the efficacy of those practices by making judgements on outcomes and final products rather than focussing on their processual efficacy by taking a relational view.

Teachers use strategies to create spaces for multiple forms of resistance by showing compliance when their practices are observed and audited. Documentisation as a form of resistance develops our understanding of the politics of quality improvement in FE polices and the way these policies facilitate the reconfiguration of power relations in a non-oppressive apparatus. Documentisation is the product of the neoliberal reasoning that seeks to relocate and redefine what quality of education in FE means.

CHAPTER 10

"I don't write a book so that it will be the final word; I write a book so that other books are possible, not necessarily written by me" (Foucault in Kimutes, 2018)

10. Recapitulation, implications and recommendations

10.1. What I wanted to explore and how I went about it

This thesis is not about problem solving conclusions and finding uncontested explanations to the problems in education; rather, it is an attempt to liberate us from the job of devising taken-for-granted solutions and adhering to self-evident truths. By outlining connections between quality improvement policies and practices, the point is to identify where we are, how we got here and how we may use our present experience to open up possibilities of rethinking quality in Further Education. This is a study in which the objective has been to break our ties with what may appear obvious and activate:

> a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to
> throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way
> ... a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and
> fundamental
>
> (Foucault, 1980, p. 328).

This determination involves archaeology to explore policy texts and discursive assemblages as well as genealogy to untangle the effects of emerging power relations in FE. At the same time, my aim has been to develop an understanding of observations by exploring practices that remain unobserved - this was my way of looking at the same thing in a different way. Examining what usually gets unnoticed, or is perhaps normally considered beyond the scope of inspections, has enabled me to adopt a critical stance that unsettles contemporary reals based on unquestioned assumptions. This destabilisation of common sense reveals that things are not as self-evident as they at first appear.

10.2. Context

The data presented in this thesis derive from a case study of a General Further Education college in a suburban area of Greater London. The study employs a qualitative research approach whereby interviews, observations and documentary data were used to produce a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary technologies of quality improvement. Two members of the senior management team, including the Principal, were interviewed on separate occasions. One ESOL for maths and five other ESOL teachers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews and then observed in their classrooms followed by another interview after the observations. All interviews were approximately an hour each and were conducted within the college premises. The data have been analysed through the Foucauldian thinking tools - archaeology and genealogy - to show how the discursive practices of the college leadership and teachers are formed through particular quality assurance agendas informed by neoliberal discourses.

10.3. What this study is about and key findings

In terms of the main research question, which looked at the links between quality improvement policies and teaching practices, this study began to build on the work of other researchers by confirming that the existing quality apparatus is based on the neoliberal ideas of our times. However, I would like to begin this section by highlighting the significance of this research work and indicate the new findings with contrast to the work done previously. There are 4 important areas in which this thesis adds to the reader's knowledge and develops an argument beyond what is already known.

10.3.1. Documentisation as a mode of resistance

The data collected at Northlands suggests that teaching practices produced for audits, forums and observations do not reflect the usual and day-to-day pedagogy. Teachers make tweaks and adjustments in order to create evidence required for validation and standardisation. At times, they are not entirely convinced of those tweaks in terms of their pedagogical value and describe them as 'pointless', but they have become good at certain adaptations to highlight certain aspects of their practice. These adaptations are seen as necessary to ensure that their 'good' practice is evidenced by acts different from those which would inform their day-to-day practice. It is important to note that teachers' engagement with policies is crucial to the observation process. Nonetheless, the purpose and mechanics of this engagement at Northlands is manifested through a novel process of documentisation, that is, teachers engineer their documentation when it needs to be scrutinised.

The problem is that samples selected for scrutiny are examined in isolation and then used to make judgements about practices in toto. It seems that teachers manipulate the system to their advantage by the selective demonstration of carefully timed and skilfully adjusted acts of compliance. In fact, this process shows an act of dissensus wrapped in compliance. It is a novel mode of resistance stemming from the interaction between Technologies of Power and Technologies of the Self. It is in this sense it becomes possible for a subject to escape the control of the dispositif by actively engaging with it – making it possible for them to break free. This plurality of resistance is inscribed in relations of power as evidenced by the experiences of the teachers and managers at Northlands.

10.3.2.   Use of Foucault as a complexity theorist

The viewpoint taken in this thesis provides a counter narrative about the quality assurance of teaching practices in Further Education. The use of a Foucauldian approach in relation to the study of complexity systems in this work allows for a more situated and contemporary understandings of quality in the sector. After using Foucault's archaeological and genealogical tools to analyse teaching practices and the way they are quality assured, we can conclude that the power relations that engineer these processes are not based on a binary structure, as presented in many studies mentioned in the literature review. The existence of power needs to be understood as transversal. For example, the effects of power manifested in teaching practices encompass resistance and we see a model or a dispositif in which power is *exercised* by all agents including teachers rather than *possessed* by managers in all situations. Teachers are not just compliant creatures trapped in Panopticism; their refusal to comply with quality agendas is not direct but takes many forms which emerge from the multiplicity of connections between social and material bodies. Their 'strategic games' sometimes make the Principal of Northlands College rethink and modify his strategic roadmap and how he delivers his vision whilst keeping potential reactions in mind rather than imposing it 'from above'. It is the complex interplay between structures and relations that gives teacher freedom which would be impossible to imagine if it were a top-down, vertical and oppressive mechanism.

The central argument made in this thesis is based on the possibility of a multiplicity of dynamic power relations and contemporary modes of resistance. It provides a starting point for the reanalysis of teaching practices in which specific understandings of quality can always be contested,

reconfigured and changed. Quality can rethought of as a field of discursive possibilities within the network of heterogeneous power relations, which offer spaces for the redeployment of these relations and the possibility that things might be otherwise.

10.3.3.   An updated analysis of knowledge and power in FE practices

Here, in seeking to think differently, we must reimagine discursive practices of FE teachers, policy makers and managers by striving to find ways whereby democratic practices will pave the way for the production of new meaning and subjectivities in social research. This research focuses on the historically underrepresented, undervalued and a disadvantaged sector in England. It provides an updated analysis of teaching practices and quality schemes in modern England by investigating the experiences of FE teachers and managers who otherwise could be left out of the contemporary educational research.

Modern power produces needs and desires enabling Technologies of the Self through which teachers become capillaries to transmit the discourse of quality often with modifications and at times on their own terms. It would be reasonable to argue that people do not always stay in the fixed positions assigned to them; they carry out different operations on themselves in order to display the behaviours deemed desirable. For example, in this context, it appears that it is a senior manager who is 'the knower' hence any decisions related to strategic policy fall inside the managerial rights and prerogatives exclusively whereas teachers, under their remit, are expected to follow instructions. However, teachers follow instructions by engaging with power through subtle resistance and find expressions of dissensus in selective compliance. It is this redistribution of the sensible that produces new modes of subjectivity and change. Knowledge in this context is linked to power that is dispersed rather than emanating from one central resource, of course.

Both managers and teachers exercise their power tactically to get their jobs done; managers adjust and readjust their strategic relationship based on their anticipation of emerging spaces of resistance. 'Power relations are obliged to change with the resistance' (Foucault, 1997, p. 167). Teachers play their strategic game by exhibiting their compliance when the work needs to be made presentable for observation but use multiple forms of resistance and construct new pedagogical possibilities through counter practice without challenging the managerialist ethos that requires them to meet the needs of the market. This type of resistance informs our understanding of a potential politics and enables

us to see how things may not the way they seem, how power can be reconfigured and how practices could be otherwise.

3.2.4. Destabilisation of common sense that defines quality

The appropriation of common sense in FE benefits from neoliberal business principles which lead to the emergence of particular discourses through curriculum, schemes of work and teaching and learning practices. The appropriation of these discourses aids the generation of desirable disciplinary practices which can be classified through the level of conformity, they exhibit, to the regulations stipulated in policies and criteria. For that purpose, the process of classification is simplified by treating practices and entities in isolation, so it is easy to make sweeping generalisations such as 'normal', 'good', 'outstanding' or 'inadequate'. These seemingly rational labels about individual practices and organisational operations have far reaching implications for how pedagogy and curriculum are understood and how this affects the ways in which policies are materialised in the classroom and in interactions amongst teachers and their line managers.

The increasingly complex and diverse educational settings in FE create many challenges for the teachers as well as the observers and inspection authorities who need to make judgements based on 'short temperature checks' and 'snapshots' of educational processes. This helps us understand the notions of self-organisation and emergence through selective compliance in teaching practices. In this context, quality of teaching depends on institutions' and teachers' – within that institution – ability to act according to inspection frameworks and policies at the times when compliance needs to be demonstrated. In addition to the compliance with the regulations, teachers use documentisation as a form of counter-conduct to the technologies of power.

The contemporary quality dispositif is based on an assumption that there is a problem with the quality of education; therefore, teaching practices need to be constantly monitored, tracked and categorised. This problematisation comes with specific language that changes meaning. For example, the terms used to define different types of practices in and outside the classroom incorporate different logics at different times. In this sense policies become an embodiment of specific rationalities and different reasoning which creates different opportunities of refusal and highlights historical discontinuities. While different criteria at different times change the meanings

of different labels, the underpinning ethos of reductive approaches used to judge the quality of education has been here for quite some time. Documentisation is a product of a rationality that has ossified the fluid and incidental character of teaching and learning; it needs to be disturbed by a critique of modern times which takes a relational view to analyse the dispositif shaped by complex power relations.

These findings are bound up with particular quality apparatuses which are informed by neoliberal logic, and need to be understood in a situated context. Quality in FE is not simply a means of assessing effective teaching; it has become a very specific type of a problem for particular authorities such as politicians. It is linked to the dominant discourses of our times and works in accordance with the strategies of power-knowledge apparatus.

10.4. Where things are and how we got here in the first place

Neoliberalism is the contemporary of face of disciplinary power and comes with 'technologies of self' and 'technologies of power' which shape the educational arena of modern-day Britain. The use of neoliberalism as a form of governmentality is concerned with self-improvement through standardisation against business principles such as efficiency, calculability, predictability and financial viability. Individuals and organisations are expected to work on their bodies and conduct to bring them in line with marketized principles and function as an enterprise. Since these bodies are free to make their decisions in terms of how they choose to conform to the contemporary 'common sense', it has become or has been made a matter of fulfilling their ambitions rather than a matter of blind obedience to authority.

The major disciplinary interventions from the state are employed via quality assurance schemes in education which manifest themselves through the use of observations. Observation of teaching, learning and assessment in a Foucauldian sense involves classroom observations, planning audits, standardisation, internal and external verification processes, quality reviews, learning walks, student fora, mock inspections and 'deep dives'. The accountability operation within this dispositif is market-based; it therefore uses the discourse of 'transparency' and 'equality' to put individuals,

institutions and practices into categories. This is a subtle and seductive operation as it works through a process of normalisation by creating its own 'sensible' and disciplining and punishing abnormalities as well as rewarding what it considers ' sane'

This market-based vision of education fits well with reductionist approaches whereby everyone should be able to use similar procedures and produce the same results. An approach such as this overlooks the complexity of an open range of possibilities in educational practices and how many 'it depends' there may be. We have seen how the exercise of disciplinary power in education presupposes certain organisational and social structures working in a uniformed fashion and demands the production of a certain type of learner experience which can be subject to regulation. The policy makers may have missed the point. The point here would be to loosen our links with reductionism informed by the McDonaldised-model of education and create opportunities to attend to the matters of educational practices with a different kind of knowability in which a fluid, non-linear, messy, incidental and unpredictable nature of teaching practices is recognised and valued.

In order to narrow the gap between policies and practices, TLA policy making needs to encompass social needs and social relationships so the educative processes are not solely informed by the demands of the market. The processes initiated and imposed 'from above' need contribution of all teachers, so the value of courses and teachers could be assessed with 'not for profit' mindset. Education sector and FE in particular needs more democracy; this could be achieved through collective decision making. Teachers do not disagree with the fact that education should equip learners with better employment skills; their concerns are about values of individualism, mistrust and profit attached to neoliberal reason. This needs to be changed to a culture based on 'collective intelligence' and instigating a process that stimulates 'empowerment through the development and pooling of intelligence to attain common goals or resolve common problems' (Brown and Lauder, 2001, pp. 218-19).

The success of neoliberalism lies in the use of disciplinary power such as observations and making people behave in a prescribed manner. The use of observations, audits and standardisation as technologies of power help classify individuals and organisations into categories which as a result have an impact on how these organisations and individuals self-perceive adjust their behaviour. This self-adjustment is linked to the concept of 'technologies of the self' employed by individuals in order

to bring their behaviour in line with what is seen as 'normal' or desirable. As noted in chapter 6, for Foucault ([1971] 1996, 351) each 'educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and power it carries with it'. The 'appropriation' could be understood as a process through which normalities are defined in policy making. It is to do with their construction – construction of knowledge, who defines it, how it needs to be understood, what counts and what does not.

10.5. Reimagining quality – what made it possible

Whilst I have used work that Foucault produced during his middle period and his analysis of disciplining and punishing bodies through panopticonism, surveillance and normalisation, I have been very careful in terms of avoiding the tendency to get worked up about his philosophy of repression, which is often used to analyse teaching and assessment practices in schools and colleges. I have done this by shifting my analysis from exclusion and categorisation to destabilisation of 'truths' and by interpreting the subtle effects of power dispersed across an organisation and sometimes the whole sector. This was made possible by the use of Foucault as a philosopher of difference, creating a space for contestation, enabling us to think differently and considering alternative possibilities. This approach led me to acknowledge the fact that to develop new ideas it is important to question ready-made and commonly accepted solutions as well as to unlearn methodologies devised to address 'poor' teaching. Such critique then required an analytical gaze that views certain rationalities behind quality improvement policies and practices with a bit of scepticism. In this sense the research adds to the existing literature by reworking the notion of quality in teaching and adding its own questions which make the quality agendas and practices 'not as necessary as all that' (Foucault, 1971, p. 8).

10.6. Where to go from here: recommendations

In this project I sought to explain what it means to think differently about quality of education and how it should be assessed. A college does not work like a clock. Quality assurance and different forms of observations sometimes go well and sometimes they do not. If grading individuals and organisations improves teaching, there would no longer be any issues linked to poor quality of

education. This begs the question; do practices and people really need to be put into slots and categories in the way it is done on a military battlefield? Using a linear approach to assess practices that are essentially non-linear constrains us to think within certain definitions of what is 'outstanding', what can be deemed 'good', what might 'require improvement' and what should be judged as 'inadequate'. These divisions and classifications based on oversimplified binaries do not quite represent the quality of teaching practices for the following four reasons:

1. The observation of live teaching as it happens in the classroom does not reflect what happens in that classroom on a day-to-day basis. Observation changes the dynamics of the classroom and affects how teachers and learners behave in an 'outsider's' presence. Teachers may do what they normally don't do or vice-versa.

2. Audits are also a form of an observation in which teachers' disembodied representation is subject to scrutiny. Most teachers adjust their work so that it conforms to the required expectations before sending their work to quality.

3. The triangulation model focuses on learner voice and the extent to which students are able to articulate their learning; this is problematic. A student who has been questioned about their learning by a stranger, may not be able to remember what they have been learning in the classroom. Some students can be trained well to do this, other could just freeze or may not want to cooperate.

4. An experienced teacher and a novice teacher are judged by the same criteria. The former could use a system of bodily recognition to act and do things more efficiently than the latter who would need to think harder before each action due to the lack of experience.

Teaching practices need to be understood in terms of their situatedness: assessed from the inside rather than making judgements from the outside. However, the data in this study suggests that quality interventions designed to assess teaching practices are there to meet the demands of the necessary conditions defined in the major policies rather than the factors related to the local context with a view of relational representation. Examining practices from the 'inside' would involve

understanding the local factors upon which these practices depend and the way they are intertwined within a particular social and cultural environment. It is this situatedness that keeps these practices and the surrounding power relations in a continuous state of flux. The current inspection policies and frameworks start with an assumption that what is taught is directly proportional to what is learned and can be made available for verification whereas teachers main challenges are not linked with their inability to follow procedures in a methodical fashion. They are often concerned with responding to students' emerging needs, adjusting to their surroundings and dealing with 'here and now' issues. Each classroom in an FE college is unique, filled with learners who have been given 'a second chance'. Even within the same classroom, their abilities vary greatly in terms of their starting points and habitus. There are factors related to digital literacy and poverty that facilitate or impede learning processes. One small change in these socio-material factors could potentially change the planned course of action entirely. Teaching in these situations requires adjusting to immediate surroundings like a living organism which is never in a state of stable equilibrium.

Understanding these practices from the 'inside' would also require more collaboration and coordination with teachers and letting them have their say about how their practices operate in their very own present-day teaching spaces. Some basic guidelines about student learning and progress are likely to work better than prescriptive inspection polices with predetermined solutions. The multi-dimensional nature of educational practices demands dealing with ecological changes which affect situations and the subjects in those situations. In this process, new possibilities emerge leading to new affects that link in novel ways because of their interdependences on socio-material factors. Unprecedented situations require unprecedented responses, and at times situations that may seem similar warrant alternative ways of reacting to them – this is not always possible within the contemporary discursive constraint's practitioners find themselves in.

Northlands College has had a long history of being in a challenging environment. It merged with another college, then demerged and also became part of a group of colleges. Over the past ten years, it has seen 5 different principles and several staff restructures. Almost a decade ago it was judged as a grade 3 (requires improvement) college and it still is. In its most recent SAR, the college senior leadership team acknowledged that 'quality of education' is still *not* grade 2 (good). This raises questions regarding the extent to which the current quality improvement measures provide avenues

for improving teaching and also about the balance between 'improvement' and 'performance management'. Why is that every Ofsted and IQR report highlights similar 'areas for development' and nothing much changes on the ground? Why is it that, in some cases, teachers are given feedback but they either 'choose to ignore' or are unable to improve or adapt their practices? Why is that there is a comprehensive coaching programme in action, but it has not translated into a better grade for the college? We have seen, CPD initiatives and coaching sessions prepare practitioners to 'pass' their observations rather than make them think about the issues that could be much bigger than observations. The Craft Model focuses on a 'do as I do' approach and the Reflective Model encourages teachers to identify what they missed from the criteria. The current quality dispositif is about producing 'outcomes' and showing 'impacts. It does not cultivate teachers' thinking about the process of incidental opportunities and potential responses. Although there may be some empirical basis and anecdotal evidence for using an approach such as this, 'outstanding-inadequate' dichotomies are not a helpful way of thinking about quality. In fact, it is a naïve and dangerous path because it gives an illusion of improvement without improving anything.

Foucault as a critic of modern disciplinarity helped me understand the type of government that classifies and excludes bodies; however, Foucault as a philosopher of dissensus and disputation taught me that it is never too late to start again, to displace what we perceive as 'natural', to replace what we think is 'necessary' and to contest what is accepted as 'truth'. We must approach the same problems with new ways of thinking. We need to free ourselves from our product-driven obsessions and transgress limits of 'prescription' in order to move into a space of experimentation. This may *not give us any instant solutions* to solve the current problems completely, but there is a hope that we may, at least, be *able to address* some of those problems. We must reimagine educational processes as a 'play of dependencies' and try and play the game slightly differently and use our subjectivities to form new rules and criteria. In other words, thinking and acting differently will lead to the emergence of 'the statement' (policies) that are not just new but also different in essence. If we do acknowledge that the business of teaching and learning is a complex, adaptive, non-linear and dynamic system, we need a system of quality assurance that is also fluid rather than predetermined: a system in which TLA policies and observation criteria are not pre-decided by a few policy makers, but it emerges from the interaction of different components taking place in a specific local environment.

In order to understand how components interact and lead to an emergence of various patterns at multiple levels, we can think about the famous bird flock example often quoted to describe the behaviour of complex and adaptive systems. A passer-by makes a flock of birds rise up; without colliding with each other, they part if and when they are facing an obstacle and then reform the group to come back to the ground as one unit. All of this happens without any director or Head Bird leading the way. What can be learnt from these emergent patterns that can inform our current understanding of educational practices? Firstly, we need to focus on the process to notice emergent patterns; and secondly, during that process, we need to look at the connections and interactions instead of focusing on different items in isolation. This does not mean that we completely ignore 'outcomes' and 'products' and just attend to processes. What it does mean is that an observer learns more about the ecology of teaching by exploring connections between components that could otherwise be seen unconnected. This would involve examining each department, college, manager, taught lesson, teacher, document in relation to the social, material and cultural atmosphere they happen to be in. This approach demands a move away from binary opposites such as outstanding-inadequate, process – product, policies-practices, quality-quantity, and start paying attention to what connects the two components. There needs to willingness to accept that choices do not have to be dichotomous; things do not have to be put into fixed categories; there could be a possibility of a third option – an option that involves learning more about practices and what links the two, rather than verifying one and rejecting the other. We could perhaps do better if we think of quality as a process defined by fluidity and self-organisation rather than a product shaped by stability and homogeneity.

One issue that became prominent during data analysis was how practitioners have become good at adapting their practices to suit different policies over time; a phenomenon referred as an example of documentisation. When policy texts and the managers and inspectors that embody those policies take a fixed view and use a static criterion and assign pre-determined labels to individuals and institutions 'objectively', documentisation is inevitably unavoidable. Professionals at different levels are going to try and meet the criteria even when some elements of that criteria are not relevant to what they do, how they do that, who they are doing it with, in what manner they are doing and why they are not doing what they could be doing. This view of things is quite different, instead of

documentising practices, it regards them as the process of emergent formations, dealing with emergent issues that arise at a particular time in a particular environment. Everything needs to be examined in relation to another. For example, how in the bird flock example, birds determine their course of action in response to what they face and come next to; they separate when there is an obstacle and come together again when it's passed. In educational practices a unique situation would require a unique response which may lead to certain patterns. It is this reciprocity of actions that influences teaching and learning practices and leads to particular types of regularities in educational spaces. The existing approach which entails generalising practices based on an interpretation of pre-determined labels imposed upon teachers and colleges requires that they prioritise the criteria not the contextual demands placed on them by their surroundings.

Instead of using a priori application of the contemporary quality regime, deliberating on teachers' ability to respond to the local demands and how they can create as well as make use of different opportunities at their disposal will enable practitioners to form their own logics. This will help teachers think about '*why* they do what they do' not just '*what* they should do. The point I wish to emphasize here is that 'quality' needs to be seen as context-dependent and as an emergent phenomenon, so practitioners and organisations are 'qualitifying' their practices consistently at all times. This will be an alternative to the exiting approach which seeks conformity for the sake of uniformity during inspections and quality reviews. Teaching practices do not take place in isolation and they are not independent of context. Identical practices can provide different opportunities for different stakeholders and beneficiaries in a different environment. The same act of cutting a tree, for example, means damaging the environment in an urban area but that damage is compensated through planting other trees in a forest. This act could also deprive a bird of their nest and other creatures from their shelter that protected them from heat, wind or rain but it may provide wood so another shelter for human beings can come into existence; it could be used to warm their houses or cook food. The same thing provides different opportunities to different stakeholders. Teaching and learning needs to be understood as a sight of echo-social atmosphere wherein quality is about adapting to existing conditions, dealing with emerging challenges, creating and exploiting learning opportunities and noticing self-organising patterns.

In practice, this could mean that each college has its own policy and bodies like Ofsted use those local policies during inspections rather than having the same criteria and using it as a recipe for assessing a grammar school in a leafy suburb and a Further Education college in the East End of London. Each department has its own handbook for observers that describes opportunities and constraints in their context that external bodies need be aware of. This gives everyone a better chance of adapting their practices, be they teaching, or observation related.

According to the 2019 Education Inspection Framework, learner voice and students being able to articulate their long-term progress is central to quality of education. Ofsted is explicit that sequencing curriculum components in a particular fashion (e.g. moving from simpler to more difficult) facilitates that progress. This concept of linearity and learner progress is problematic as it carries a mechanistic assumption regarding the very fact of learning, and how it is proportional to teaching. Restricting efficacy of teaching practices to students' ability to verbalise their memorised content becomes even more problematic in curriculum areas such as ESOL whereby these practices are bound up with cultural practices. The fact that teaching practices are culture-specific means that an expert teacher may not be able to demonstrate their expertise if students struggle to engage with procedures that appear alien to them. Culture in terms of educational trajectories is not limited to customs and beliefs from a different country – it includes social class, economic status, peer effects and social milieu. Subject-specific pedagogy and familiarity with the local and cultural factors is likely to lead us to the discovery of new relations and discursive formations in which the sole purpose of teaching is not to meet the needs of the market.

Learning about teachers' and learners' subjective experiences will help observers understand others' position. At present graded observations, quality reviews, and audits are carried out by managers and most of them have not taught for quite some time. Therefore, they approach quality of education by means of universally defined managerial principles. Perhaps there is something to learn from HE and its peer review traditions. More specifically, and thinking further about the kind of inspections to use going forward, we could argue that all forms of 'observations' should be carried out by peers. Different co and peer teaching models raise the possibility that one teaches, the other observes and vice versa. Audits could also be done anonymously by those who are in a position to make their own planning documentation and samples of marking feedback available to their peers. This will not only

change power relations but will also narrow the existing gap between policies and teaching which manifests itself in the production of documentised practices.

The change has to come from within and there is always a possibility to make that happen. As Foucault puts it:

> [w]e cannot jump outside the situation, and there is no point where you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it ... [T]here is always the possibility of changing

(Foucault, 1997, p. 167).

The power structure in FE is not vertical because teachers are free to resist; documentisation is a product of contemporary modes of resistance. There are no policy makers and managers in possession of absolute power; teachers can use the multiplicity of power relations to explore the possibility of what quality means to them and how it may be enacted differently, so their teaching practices become more 'enabling' and creative. This can be done by embracing the new interruptions that each day brings, by adapting pedagogical directions, understanding emergent connections and by creating new cultural formations. It is unlikely that the current grading systems are going to disappear tomorrow; teachers and Quality Heads have to learn to live with them, but at the same time approach this system of classification with a new set of ideas, possibilities and questions. They need to start rethinking quality and reimagining their existing modes of dissent by exploring opportunities to fully immerse in processes embedded within the materiality of their own teaching – this will enable us to shift the focus of the existing policies that embody a disciplinary system of classification. The ongoing task would be to construct ways of practising quality that could counter an unhelpful *obsession with impacts and outcomes*, which currently determines the entirety of contemporary educational practices. This would enable us to recognise that our present experience of outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate is produced historically and gains its discursive significance from power relations that are *enabling* rather than *oppressive*. Therefore, Foucauldian optimism can be used to destabilise the product-driven operations and to explore alternatives that are more process-oriented.

From this starting point, we can consider modes of thought which do not aim to eliminate grading and classification systems but to learn to live with them by attending to them differently. In that respect, my work calls out for a critical distancing from the contemporary dispositif - which constructs quality in a reductive fashion – as well as from the historical baggage around it, and bids for opening up spaces of inquiry which engender new definitions of 'outstanding' whereby the locus of quality improvement shifts from the noun '*improvement'* to the verb '*improving', from 'being* outstanding' to '*becoming* outstanding' – definitions that are not confined to limiting judgments. Rather they involve different ways of refusal and transgression by challenging discursive limits within which our subjectivities are constructed, and our practices are articulated. And particularly, such definitions would constitute descriptions of ongoing processes and emerging patterns, encompassing a series of opportunities and obstacles during the whole process in the sense of evolving. More importantly, they must contain an elucidation of how we make it possible to do what we do and how we form self-organising patterns by overcoming the hurdles standing in our way. That is exactly the way in which birds respond to their ever-changing ecologies by travelling, with one another, in a flock like a superorganism. Rather than delivering any utopian finalities, this research is offered in the hope of encouraging that much needed experimentation and facilitating a long-overdue reform.

10.7. Future research studies

The reconceptualization of the notion of quality emphasised in this thesis does not involve an outright rejection of the contemporary dispositif. It simply highlights the potential significance of other possibilities to constitute alternative frameworks and mechanisms which can enable us to engage more with *the process* of teaching and learning. This perspective involves engaging more with local and situated contexts, redefining quality assurance assemblages and questioning their contemporary configurations rather than prescribing how all schools, colleges, teachers and principals should behave and 'what must be done' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 174) In the coming years, I intend to work on the actual structure and the working of a range of modalities that can be used to explore how good teaching practices in a particular institution are and how they can be made better. This thesis is just the beginning of this journey – the terminus a quo.

As a starting point, this research encapsulates the essence of existing FE policies and practices and how they may indicate a lapse and the potential end of neoliberalism in education. The features of complex systems and the interactions between the elements of their sub-systems need to be explored further in other education sectors too. It would be useful to read Foucault as a complexity theorist in conjunction with the exercise of power in schools, universities and private organisations. The term *documentisation* introduced in thesis needs to be unpacked further outside of FE settings.

11.   References

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