English GCSE Reform from Whitehall to the Classroom: Reform, Resistance, Reality

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Submitted for the qualification of PhD in Education

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February 2020

99,980

Abstract

This thesis develops a "policy trajectory" (Ball 1993) study of the content, aims, and ambitions of the 2013 reforms to GCSE English, and their ongoing enactment by practitioners since 2015. The study utilises a cross-sectional design to capture different moments in a policy's life seeking to understand and analyse how policymakers, politicians and teachers, in their different ways, construct ideas about "school English", "teaching" and "the teacher". Firstly, using concepts provided by *the logics of critical explanation* (Glynos and Howarth 2007), it examines how, through politicians' speeches and policy documents, the state constructs relatively stable (though contingent) notions of "teaching" and "English", arguing that the functions and purposes of [English] teaching are organised by the "master signifier" of professional autonomy. This pivotal concept ties together a seductive programme of new actors, ideas about autonomy, knowledge acquisition, and managerial practices all grounded within intellectual frameworks of neoliberalism and cultural conservatism. Secondly, through an in-depth case study of a single secondary school, the thesis demonstrates the complex ways that practitioners 'enact' policy, and how at 'the front line' this converges with or departs from elite policy goals.

The thesis thus contributes to an emerging strand of education policy sociology that emphasises "enactment of policy" (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012), and builds on it by going beyond semi-structured interview data to consider ethnographic accounts of policy work in English classrooms, staff room discussions and interactions. It develops empirical and theoretically-informed arguments about the processes of enactment and their connection to broader discourses concerning teacher professionalism, subjectivity, praxis, and the workings of power, showing that whilst the reforms and their embedded discourses prompted new ways of working with data practices and standardisation, many "softer" interventions on curriculum and pedagogy were largely ignored or subsumed by external contexts.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

DES	Department for Education and Science (1964-1990)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (2001-2007
DFCS	Department for Children, Schools and Family (2007-2010)
DfE	Department for Education (2010-current)
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
KS3	Key Stage Three
KS4	Key Stage Four
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Ofqual	The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
MATs	Multiple Academy Trusts
WJEC	Welsh Joint Education Committee

Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to a great many people, who at various points have assisted me in developing and writing this thesis.

To all the practitioners I have met throughout my brief time working in schools, and especially to those voices that populate this thesis for your time and expertise.

To the Schools of *Education and Lifelong Learning* and *Politics, Philosophy, and Language and Communication Studies*. These departments have been my home on and off for a decade now, and both have provided supportive staff and students and a vibrant and engaging atmosphere from which to pursue my studies.

To my supervisors John Gordon and Alan Finlayson for their encouragement, understanding and expertise.

To friends who helped me to remain sociable during this process, and to my partner Clarissa for providing the understanding and space to get this thesis finished at a time when we are learning to be parents to our wonderful son.

And finally, to my father and late mother to whom this thesis is dedicated for their unwavering devotion and support that only unconditional love fosters.

Introduction Chapter

This thesis takes the 2013 reforms to GCSE English[1] and analyses the enactment of their legislative content, ideas, and concepts by teachers in a single secondary school based in the East of England[2]. These reforms include a number of intervening statements across the three domains of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and articulate ideas about teaching within a particular programme of educational conservatism. Much journalistic commentary has been written about the 2013 "Gove reforms", but less has been recorded empirically at ground-level concerning how the policy goals have played out in practice, since their inception into schools in 2015. Accordingly, this thesis captures the opportunity. I develop an ideational analysis of speeches and policy documents in order to better understand how these reforms have reimagined the educational landscape in English schooling and school English in particular. Following the work of Ball et al. (2012), I contribute to our understanding of the institutional enactment of this policy by English teachers (who are both the objects and subjects of the reform). I argue for a policy trajectory analysis that asks questions about how and why practitioners accede or resist policy goals within the different "moments" of enacting policy in their everyday practices, talk and "thought".

Overall, then, I am concerned with how the combination of policy-makers, politicians and teachers, in their different ways, constructs ideas about school English and teaching. By drawing on policy data from speeches and white papers, as well as participant fieldwork in a

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[1] This date refers to the public statement made by Michael Gove on the 8th of July 2013, when in a written statement to parliament, he announced there would be a consultation on a new National Curriculum (Gove 2013f). Teaching of this reform commenced in September 2015 and the first cohort of pupils completed their qualification in September 2017.

[2] The school is referred to as *Lime Tree* (pseudonym) throughout this thesis.

school setting, I try to make sense of areas of convergence and divergence between the policy goals set by the state, and the everyday decisions and practices that arise from teachers enacting policy goals within their various contexts. From this study, I maintain that we gain a more precise window into the intellectual underpinnings of these conservative-led[3] reforms, which can help to situate the GCSE English reforms within a broader programme of changes to education that have occurred in the past decade. There is value therefore in adding to the evidence base of a contentious contemporary reform[4] as it is enacted in a school setting. For policy-makers, this thesis provides an empirical, in-depth study of the "fate" of this reform. Moreover, for academics and practitioners, some value can be drawn from the connections the work makes between the processes of reform and questions of teaching professionalism, subjectivity, praxis, and the working of power.

Research Questions

This thesis addresses three research questions:

1) How are ideas of schooling, teaching, 'the teacher', and English as a subject, conceived of in the corpus making up the analysis of the 2013 reforms?

2) How do practitioners interpret and translate the reforms in their institutional setting?

3) Reflecting on the answers to questions one and two, what can be said about the "fate" of the English reforms?

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[3] The Liberal Democrats formed a junior partner in the 2010 government, however, from now on I will refer to the reforms as "Conservative reforms". The thinking behind curriculum and pedagogy was developed by Michael Gove, and to a lesser extent Nick Gibb (who introduced Gove to Hirsch's work).
[4] The DfE report on the consultation received 212 responses, which was 'one of the highest response rates' (2013b, 6), and received a lot of commentary across the news media (See Toynbee 2013; Didau 2014b).

My first research question asks how politicians and policy-makers since the 2010 coalition have conceived of and constructed, the concepts of twenty-first-century schooling, teaching, and "the teacher" and English as a subject. To answer this question, I analyse a corpus of relevant speeches, White Papers, and policy documentation using concepts drawn from *the logics of critical explanation* (Glynos and Howarth 2007) to reveal a series of "logics" or patterns that characterise the reforms in more general terms. These logics help interpret the way specific ideas and concepts constitute an educational programme that encompasses cultural conservative ideas about curriculum and pedagogy, along with neoliberalist technologies of governance. I argue that the key concept of these reforms, binding together a number of otherwise disparate ideas, is that of "professional autonomy", and that this is a very particular way of understanding teachers' "freedom".

Answering the second research question requires capturing how policy gets *done* in contextually-shaped ways. Inspired by enactment theory, I conducted participant fieldwork over 12 months as a learning support assistant in an English department at a single secondary school. Drawing on this fieldwork and on interviews with English teachers, I seek to make sense of what the reforms meant for teachers planning, implementing and assessing the new English GCSE. I show the active "sense-making", or interpretive work that takes place during policy enactment as part of teachers' "contextualised self-interpretations" (Bevir and Rhodes 2003). There are several subsidiary questions to consider such as how teachers, working within core discourses, construct ideas about themselves and their teaching. How does their interpretation and translation of the reforms accede to or resist policy goals? By paying attention to the everyday actions and talk of practitioners within their institutions, we can better understand how they construct their sense of their professional role in the context of what governance theory calls "practices of rule" (Rose 2005a; Dean

2010) which through 'subjectification, domination and fabrication' set norms and standards with which to 'monitor, measure and render calculable the performance of these various agencies' (Dean 2010, 193).

Finally, by taking the findings and analysis of the first two questions, my third research question asks about the "fate" of the policy goals, as they become realised within an institutional school setting. It is here that I consider the extent to which teachers share the same policy goals as politicians and policy-makers, or whether the enactment of policy within several institutional contexts, such as the values and ethos of a particular school or its pupil intake, leads to notable divergences. Along with contexts found within an individual school, policy goals also contend with (or some support) the hard reality of external contexts that are set outside institutions, such as Ofsted and exam board criteria or how performance tables are constructed. Taken together, this creates a complex picture of policy formulation and enactment, which requires in-depth immersion with the data, in order to provide empirical clues to better grasp the various trajectories of policy goals and concepts. From here, we can reflect on how we might rethink the aims of policy intervention by government into schools.

Policy Trajectories: From Whitehall to the classroom

A key aim of this thesis is to theorise policy as something that does not just occur at any one moment in time and space. This thesis builds on the insights of enactment theory, a developing field of policy sociology analysis, (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012; Braun, Ball, and Maguire 2011). I want to argue that the processes and fate of a particular policy's life, is best read through a 'cross-sectional' analysis that takes account of the 'policy formulation, struggle and response', amongst a number of state and non-state actors (Ball 1993, 16). This approach is opposed to a single analysis that privileges the state as a 'closed preserve of the formal apparatus of policy-making' (Ozga 1999, 42). Such a commitment dissolves the 'false dichotomy' regularly assumed between the

production of policy at a state level and its implementation by schools (Gale 1999, 395). It forces a reconfiguration of our understanding of policy work. Given that there are many types of "trajectories" that one can take, depending on the aims and objectives of the researcher and study, I justify my research design and methodological choices in *Chapter Two*.

Given my aim is to argue for the fact that policy does not move linearly from the state to the school, the use of "*from*" Whitehall to the Classroom in my thesis title may seem a little misleading. Here, Whitehall and the classroom are indicated as potential objects and spaces of interest, amongst others, where policy is thought about and done. As a preposition, "from" can signify a starting point in a spatial movement, but it can also be used to express removal or separation. The point here is that there are good reasons for thinking about where differences and distances exist between policy-as-discourse at the state level and institutionally. For instance, the technical processes, realities and degrees of accountability of policy-making are usually different for civil servants than that of school practitioners. There are different contexts, administrative structures, and priorities[5]. During my fieldwork, many at the coalface articulated this difference and distance with comments and directional metaphors such as 'they haven't got a clue what's happening *on the ground*' or [directly speaking to me] 'if you ever get to speak to them *up there*, tell them what it's like *down here*'. Part of the ambition for policymakers and politicians is to find technical strategies (policy-makers) and the right language (politicians) to narrow that distance, albeit with varying success. Part of the work of *Chapter Three* is to discuss how this is attempted with discursive and

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[5] Peter Kemp, the project manager for Next Steps (a New Labour policy for the NHS) talked about how he reminded himself about the 3000 civil servants who had to "think" about policy, and the half a million that had to "do" the policy and 'actually deliver what Ministers and, through them, society wants' (Peter Kemp quoted in Hennessy 2001). Kemp captures a key difference, but I would add that those enacting policy in schools also do a great deal of thinking about policy too.

rhetorical strategies that try to persuade members of the teaching profession or parents. These "framing devices" form the "grammar" which account for the '*dynamics* of social change' (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 145).

In my research, it was also possible to see practices and 'thought' that converged with the state's logic of standards and performance agenda. Divergences came about as a result of the fact that discursive formations always emerge with 'exclusions, limits, or gaps' (Foucault 2002, 124), which are filled with other logics derived from the agency and values of practitioners, or institutional contexts. Because it is so often neglected in normative policy analysis, the role of this thesis is to highlight why distance and difference matters for the policy goals of the GCSE English policy.

It is a key assumption of theorists and who find value in Michel Foucault's (2008) insights into the workings of modern liberal governance that free subjects adopt techniques and practices that mirror the objectives of a regime of government. Part of the challenge of studying forms of modern power is to capture the strategies and techniques by which individuals are connected to the state at a distance. Mitchel Dean refers here to how the 'capacities and attributes of subjects and the king of freedom which they make possible are shaped within regimes of government' (Dean 2010, 47). Much has been written about how school management systems have been developed within advanced liberal governmentality systems, where policy subjects have their agency activated, but set within a system of 'norms, standards, benchmarks, performance indicators, quality controls and best practice standards' which 'monitor, measure and render calculable the performance' (193). This thesis attempts to focus on the implications of this for teachers attending to reform within a particular regime of practices of government, such as the current administrative structures of a school, or the way pupil or staff performance is collected and

calculated. Part of the work of analysis is to identify the 'relatively stable field' correlating several 'mentalities', 'technologies' and 'visibilities', as they 'concern the direction of conduct' of social actors (37).

Furthermore, there might also be some objection to singling out "Whitehall" given the role that non-state actors play in policy formation. Ball has explored how, with modern policy-construction, policy is a result of many key policy actors and ideas that have become global. Just take the call for schools to develop a knowledge-driven National Curriculum (a key component of the 2013 reforms). Even a cursory Google search of "knowledge-driven National Curriculum" brings up DfE documentation, information on key policy actors such as Tim Oates from Cambridge Assessment, Core Knowledge (linked to Civitas, a right-leaning think tank) and a number of schools who have clearly worked hard to embed "core knowledge" in their Search Engine Optimisation strategy. Moreover, many policy actors are hidden because they include speechwriters and anonymous civil servants who may have helped construct key policy documents and communication. Despite this, my thesis argues that by analysing speeches, documents and White Papers, it is possible to pick up the 'traces, elements and dimensions of political activity' related to, or embedded in a text (Wiesner, Haapala, and Palonen 2017, 60). The theoretical mechanics and analytical work for the 2013 reforms are explored in some depth in *Chapter Three.*

Writing his detailed history about the institution of Whitehall, Peter Hennessy quips that: 'the functions came first. The names came later' (2001, 17). As well as a place where statutory policy texts are written, Whitehall acts as a useful metonymy for characterising the much larger underlying policy infrastructure and functions. Also, as I will argue, the rationale of the state and the deep logics embodied within its policy bureaucracy, often ultimately (and sometimes unwittingly) shape the reform objectives of politicians too.

Reform, Resistance, Reality: the sociologist's three 'R's.

Consecutive governments have continued to be gripped by the rhetorical power of the three R's, which we can trace back to the 1862 Revised Code's (supported by Robert Lowe MP) recommendation that school funding should be tied to how many pupils succeeded in an examination of the three R's (reading, writing and arithmetic) (see Maclure 1979). At the time, this idea was forcefully rebuked by Matthew Arnold (cultural critic but also schools inspector) because he was indisposed to the principle that schools might be rewarded (financially) for the success of children mastering these narrow skill sets alone (1908, 135). Instead, he proposed that incentives should be organised to avoid a situation where a school was defined in terms of being 'a mere machine for teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic'; the state should encourage a schooling system that advanced 'living whole with complex functions, religious, moral and intellectual' (Arnold quoted in Connell 1998, 213–214). In the end, Arnold won a compromise, and a third of the grant was given as maintenance rather than merely exam success.

Arnold has been evoked by the architects of the 2013 reforms to GCSEs, most significantly Michael Gove and Nick Gibb, as an important defender of liberal education tradition. Gove, for instance, defends the role of liberal learning by 'reclaiming the importance of education as a good in itself' (Gove 2011c). Arnold's most famous line: 'the best that has been thought and said', is (mis)quoted in the English curriculum documents as 'thought and written'[6]. An active discussion running through this thesis is how these two components stack up together in policy theory and practice. For instance, Gove talks positively about schools that rank children 'in every subject for effort, and also artistic

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[6] This emphasis on writing over speaking has been engrained in the English reforms now that the oral assessment is no longer counts towards a pupil's final GCSE grade. Instead, it is assessed by schools as a separate certificate.

and sporting achievement' (Gove 2011c). Gove's reasoning captures a continuation and intensification of neoliberal systems within schools, starting with the Thatcher government's increasing reliance on performance tables and continued by New Labour's 'intelligent accountability' regime (Miliband 2004). Despite David Cameron's protestations in opposition about this form of state-heavy accountability, (an idea notably influenced by the 'red Toryism' of Philip Blond (see McSmith 2009)), this is a system that has continued to be intensified by successive Conservative governments. Furthermore, there has been the attempt to deepen the role of evidence and data systems, and with it a blunt reliance of the state on these sorts of measures to deem whether schools are successful.

Given that school performance metrics heavily influence parental choice regarding their child's prospective schools (Burgess et al. 2011), this, in turn, dictates what funding schools receive, given the current funding arrangements. There is an argument, therefore, that we are still playing out Arnold's concerns just on a different political and social terrain!

In trying to maintain some rhetorical parity, I asked what three R's might help guide me as a researcher when faced with twenty-first-century school English as my subject and my object. Briefly working through these three Rs, I hope, will provide necessary clarification about the epistemological and ontological assumptions that shape this thesis with regards to how I am using policy (reform), the prospective agency of social actors (resistance), and the importance of studying an empirical institutional environment (reality). The three Rs acted as the measure for how I should capture the processes and minutia of policy and policy enactment work. These were not prescriptive concepts from the start, but I was mindful that how I talked about these concepts would provide important information about how I conceived of the policy process, and its enactment through actions and speech.

On reform, I have already gestured towards analysing policy in terms of enactment theory (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). *Chapter Two* offers some depth concerning my rationale for this and some critical heuristics that provided me with sharp analytics for reading policy. For instance, policies need to be considered as both ideational constructs as well as being 'very material' (3). When considering the fate of any policy, whether it opens up or limits the discursive space available to practitioners, I needed a policy analysis that took stock of key state actors, as well as school managers and teachers who had to enact these policies in the school. In contrast to normative policy analyses that place too much focus on 'the formal government apparatus', enactment policy conceives of policy as a combination of texts, as well as discursive processes that 'are complexly configured, contextually mediated and institutionally rendered' (3). My analysis is therefore driven in a way to comment on the trajectory of specific policy goals, as well as to consider broader concerns such as the function that power and governance play when policy conceives of teachers as actors as well as subjects: that is, how 'policy is written onto bodies and produces particular subject positions') (3).

I also leverage concepts and tools from the logics approach developed by academics working with Ernesto Laclau's legacy of Essex School discourse theory (Glynos and Howarth 2007). There are important differences in theoretical assumptions between the Ball et al.'s (2012) enactment theory and Laclau's, which are discussed in *Chapter Two*. The *logics of critical explanation* approach, however, has been useful in characterising the rhetorical and discursive strategies of state-driven policy, as well as providing a way to articulate a series of contingent but stable patterns that policy subjects are working within at state level. The approach links to a social research design that tries to combine description, explanation and criticality (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 154), which ties back to the function of this thesis to be purposely deliberative

about the current direction of education reform. The extent to which the "excesses" of these modes of thinking, namely neoliberal and managerial discourses, actually organise the *context of practice* (or the school environment), is a key reason for developing the trajectory beyond a reading of state politics.

Resistance, the second 'R', points to a principle in my policy analysis: that teachers are conceived as having agency in the policy process. Most normative policy analyses write out agents at ground level with their extended focus on the state apparatus, and inputs and outputs. This thesis assumes that all objects and identities are contingently held (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 152) and that the process of "text to practice" means that policy is 'open to erosion and undercutting by action', as a result of 'the embodied agency of those people who are its object' (Ball 1994, 10–11). This activity is, however, agency conducted on discursively limited ground. Teaching discourse is a formulation of policy concepts 'which have been sedimented over time in the language of teaching and which constitute the contours of professional practice and subjectivity' (Ball et al. 2011, 622). This policy layering has implications for policymakers because teachers might find that some policy goals contradict, or grate against previous policy demands that have already shaped the *context of practice*. The Pupil Premium policy, introduced by the coalition government in 2011, for instance, orientates the notion of achievement of disadvantaged pupils doggedly towards attainment; New Labour, however, had instilled achievement within a much broader 'whole school' framework of *Every Child Matters* (Williams 2004, 414). This sedimentation of policy values arguably plays out through how teachers and school leaders recontextualise policy aims and negotiate from a position of multiple professional values, practices and institutional logics (see Craske 2018).

In the key enactment theory book, produced by Ball et al. (2012), they discuss the absence of any 'great Foucauldian refusal', likely referring to

Foucault's focus on the 'channels' power takes in seeking 'individual modes of behaviour', which can lead to the effects of 'refusal, blockage, and invalidation' (Foucault 1990, 11). Maguire et al. (2018) make the point that not all resistance need be political, and draw attention to Bell and West's discussion of 'thin' and 'thick' opposition of race relations in America[7] (39). Although schools do reproduce dominant forms of power relations, it is important to consider the number of 'complex and creative fields of resistance through which class-race-and gender mediated practices often refuse, reject, and dismiss the central messages of the schools' (Giroux 1983)[8].

Finally, I refer to the idea of "reality". How I conceive of reality is central to interrelated questions about how I theorise policy and how I approach collecting and analysing the fieldwork data in this thesis. I have already explained some of my assumptions regarding policy. Following Ball, I understand policy as something that moves 'between modes', for example, policy *text* developed by state actors requires practice by *actions* (Ball 2009a). The reference to reality is, therefore, a call to pay attention to the minutiae of policy processes within an

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[7] It should be noted that Bell and West do not consider thin' opposition alone sufficient to deal with more substantive structural issues and not all 'thin' oppositional behaviour is a clear-cut response to domination (see Giroux 1983, 285).

[8] This might be true of teachers as much as pupils. For instance, in an interview, one teacher talked about the inflexibility of her job, in conjunction with looking after her own children. The school's economic logic and efficiency of timetabling, resulted in part-time workers having to come in almost every day in the mornings rather than having whole days off. This led to difficulties for teachers tying their professional job with being the caregiver's they wanted to be for their young children. There were several examples throughout the year where having children seemed to be at odds with working in the teaching profession. Childminders would not work half days, for instance, and the extra working days added petrol costs. At the end of the year, one teacher moved to a school that offered more flexible working conditions because of this reason. These difficulties, however, rarely formed into thick oppositional action, but were better characterised as half-silences, that were sometimes whispered in frustration in conversations in the staff room, or during an interview. The contradictions that the economic system hoists on caregivers has at times spilt over into the public domain; David Graeber (2014) has talked about the "caring classes" and the gulf between them, and those 'who benefit from their caring labour' to keep the system running. Many took part in the Occupy Wall Street, not least because they were being inhibited from doing their jobs as well as making ends meet.

institutional setting. This movement between modes impugns policy analyses that focus squarely on outcomes as a criterion for understanding whether policy has worked. Many of these analyses conceive of the objects of policy as having 'context-independent characteristics' that when tied with theory, can 'explain and predict other evaluations and other information' (Flyvbjerg 2001, 44). Instead, we can learn a lot about the policy process, and the changes it initiates from studying how practitioners go about interpreting and translating policy within institutional conditions that include contingent but stable logics.

This thesis draws on the work of Bent Flyvbjerg who has written on the concept of *phronesis*: the concept Aristotle gives to the idea of context-dependent, practical wisdom that 'concerns the analysis of values' (2001, 57). If policy analysis benefits from interacting with the 'messy reality of school life', then my fieldwork has been set up in a way to capture 'thick' data, such as staff and classroom interactions (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 43). This methodology included paying attention to the dynamics of the classroom as well as the 'mundane exchanges' that form part of the everyday interaction of policy work (45). Ball (2011) has referred to taking note of the 'under-life' of policy (2): re-materialising policy by scratching its under-life and not just its surface! Normative policy analyses read policy from *outside in* by focussing on objects and causation, and by assuming individuals will form predictable and measurable (or evaluative) behaviours. The policy delivery chain, for instance, assumes that targets and focussed "pressure" will lead to predictive outcomes in social actors. My objective here is to read policy from the *inside out*. By reading policy work within the parameters of practice, it is possible to start thinking about how this necessitates a broader frame through which the 'processes of formation and transformation' form part of broader social changes and are tied to questions of professional subjectivities (Seddon 1994, 197).

Why English?

English has played an essential part of the broader reforms concerning knowledge-based pedagogies (see Willingham 2009a) and cultural literacy (Hirsch 1988; Hirsch 2006). It takes its place as a component in the core knowledge movement. For the Conservative government's reading of cultural literacy, it provides the link between a broader Western inheritance and 'our island's story' (Gove 2010b). Nick Gibb's defence of Latin teaching, for instance, is framed within the lineage of past literature: starting from Virgil and Ovid, figures of the Roman Empire, that pave the way for the 'great tradition of Western literature leading to Chaucer, Shakespeare, Keats and Eliot' (Gibb 2010). There have been similar references to other school subjects such as the 'new knowledge-rich science curriculum' that now 'focuses on the big ideas in science' (Gibb 2014c). English, however, finds itself not only part of the English Baccalaureate, but for conservatives, it is a subject to gauge perceived cultural decay: according to Gove, too many GCSE papers were getting pupils talking about 'Tinie Tempah, or Simon Cowell - rather than encouraging the child to thirst after the knowledge of the teacher' (Gove 2013e). Moreover, English language policy provides the foundational literacy on which other subjects are based, making it a subject of significance (Goodson and Medway 1990, vii).

I assumed that English would provide a complex and rich subject matter. It is a young subject with a contested centre (Ball 1982), and as such, I expected there to be a complex negotiation about policy goals. Previous studies into the differing philosophies of English teachers provide a picture of negotiated readings about subject content and pedagogy (Marshall 2000). The 1921 Newport Report had to argue for English to be admitted to schools when other subjects such as modern languages and the sciences were already established. Part of the problem was that English lacked a formed 'body of facts and concepts to be learned' (Medway 2014, 2). Even today, Kress et al. have made the

point that although the science classroom already presumes that the 'entities of the science curriculum have thus for the most part been known and stable', English, from its pedagogy to its curriculum is concerned with the function of meaning (2005, 3). For Kress et al., the attempt to move English to conform to other subjects was a process that is 'very much in process' during the New Labour period (their fieldwork spans 2000-2003) (4). With renewed vigour, and within a new intellectual programme of reforms, this thesis aims to explore to what extent this has continued to be the case.

Structure of the Thesis

In this introduction, I have set out why I believe this thesis can act as a timely and pertinent intervention to better comprehend the intellectual underpinnings of a series of ambitious education reforms pursued by the 2010 coalition, and subsequent Conservative governments. My entry point is the 2013 reforms to GCSE English, which encompasses a raft of measures concerning curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. I maintain that there are scholarly and practical benefits of pursuing the 'fate' of this policy as it becomes enacted within an institutional setting, and for analysing the broader implications that ensue from the way English teachers interpret and translate particular policy goals within their various contexts. Moreover, I have set out my research questions, provided a short thesis statement, and introduced my reasoning for evoking key concepts that appear throughout this thesis as a way of locating these within my overall research design, and theoretical and methodological approaches that I take.

In the following chapter, *Chapter One: Literature Review*, I aim to offer a discussion of education policy theory literature, the contemporary landscape and English, in order to provide a reading of the 2013 GCSE English reforms. Such an exercise is designed to navigate a path for the reader by situating this thesis in its relevant academic fields. I draw from strands of policy literature to firstly analyse where academics have

focused their research, and secondly, to assess some of the continuities and discontinuities between New Labour and Conservative governments. I will then move on to focussing on English as a subject more specifically. Here, I will trace out English's young and contested history as a core school subject, from the 1921 Newbolt Report to the introduction and development of the National Curriculum in 1988. I will focus on the canon and how governments have utilised it for shaping new ideas about what the curriculum should contain. Pooling this together, I will provide a reading of the 2013 reforms in their historical, social and political place.

*Chapter Two: Towards a Policy Trajectory for English Reform d*evelops some essential assumptions about policy theory and methodology as they are utilised for this thesis. It discusses my rationale for characterising the state reforms through a particular strand of post-structuralist social theory (Glynos and Howarth 2007), and why I choose to deploy the heuristics of enactment theory to help understand how they English reforms were enacted in a single secondary school (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012). It is from this base that I reiterate my research questions and discuss why I choose to develop participant work within a single school case-study, to my fieldwork.

Chapter Three: Problematising the 2013 Reforms to GCSE English, is my first empirical chapter, which draws on a corpus of 58 speeches, oral debates, policy documents and communication. Here I apply tenets of rhetorical and discourse analysis, and *the logics of critical explanation* (Glynos and Howarth 2007), in order to characterise several seemingly noisy (and sometimes contradictory) statements made by ministers about the functions and purpose of teaching, "the teacher", and concepts such as learning. This chapter sets up the three further empirical chapters by providing a backdrop for why certain concepts are having to be enacted by English departments around the country. Furthermore, it offers the reader more clarity about how and why

divergences in policy goals occurred. Moreover, by characterising these reforms as the culmination of culturally conservative and neoliberalist traditions, this thesis is committed to demonstrating how the reform constructs notions around English, teaching and learning which are both contingent and negotiable.

There are two main functions of *Chapter Four: A Reform in its Institutional Context(s).* The first is to provide detail on my school by using the different contexts outlined in Ball et al. 's (2012) enactment work. This work involves detailing processes such as how teachers went about their teaching environment through their understanding of the school's ethos, their pupil intake, the external pressures that they face with a particular Ofsted rating or exam pressure, or their previous professional experience. Importantly, the chapter makes the point that these contextual factors shape how policy is interpreted and translated. The second aim of the chapter is to show how decisions such as choosing exam boards or curriculum design are made at the department level and within contextual concerns that are not anticipated by policy-makers. I focus on how school context shapes how *Lime Tree* went about enacting cultural literacy initiatives.

In *Chapter Five: Policy in the Black box of the English Classroom*, I draw on the metaphor adopted by Paul Black and Dylan William (2010) to make the point that policy-as-implementation does not focus on the processes (or craft) of teaching in the classroom. A policy proposal is input and policy-makers expect specific, measurable outcomes (in the form of data) which are then used to judge the success or failure of the individual intervention. Taking examples from teaching novels, poetry and English language, I analyse how teachers at *Lime Tree* approach teaching the reform content within their everyday contexts. Paying attention to the details of the classroom context, this has important implications for understanding why policy objectives from the English reforms are recontextualised in particular ways by teachers.

In my final empirical chapter, *Chapter Six: Teacher Professionalism, or (Re)imagining the English Teacher,* I focus on the concept of teacher professionalism. The Conservative reforms have attempted to intervene on the subjectivities of English teachers. The chapter considers how this intervention has been negotiated by teachers in their everyday thinking and practices. These policy interventions are broader than English, but the way English teachers approached these issues with reference to their professional understanding of the subject, allowed me to explore how policy is enacted through [data] practices, translated through policy artefacts or how it gives rise to affective responses. In sum, the chapter is concerned with how teachers mediate the entanglement of "global" discourses in schooling discourse with local, school-based contexts.

Following this, *Chapter Seven: Further Discussion and Conclusion* ties together the key themes in this thesis with an extended discussion of my research questions. In so doing the chapter reflects on my research questions and the contribution of this work. The chapter considers the utility of this work for different stakeholders. For academics working in policy or English studies, my intention is to have contributed to the ever-growing evidence-base of research associated with curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (including practices around data). For policy stakeholders, I hope to have shown that the normative policy designs, built around inputs, data monitoring and outcomes do not fully capture the full fabric of this particular policy's life. Such neglect can have implications about the "success" of the goals of this policy and other current and future ones too, as a result of how they are interpreted.

Although it is time-consuming and labour intensive, social research and education policy benefit from paying close attention to the central dynamics of the institutional setting. For practitioners, this thesis is an attempt to engage with daily realities, some of which might be recognisable in the following pages. It is in no way prescriptive; my

primary function is to address the education and English teaching landscape as I encountered it "in the field". Instead, it attempts to tackle these reforms through a deliberative voice. In an age of constant movement, there is time to slow down, pay attention to the particular and local, and to consider how power links to the processes of enacting reform. This insight in its turn has ramifications for professionals' subjectivities and the shaping of a core subject in English schools.

The next chapter will begin with a discussion of different literatures across policy theory and English in order to situate this study and to provide a critical reading of the 2013 GCSE English reforms.

Chapter One

Literature Review

The role of this literature review is to provide the reader with 1) an overview of the literature in education policy theory; 2) an exploration of some key trends in English schooling and school English, for the purpose of 3) interpreting a policy reading of the 2013 reforms to GCSE English literature and language. Limited space means that I cap my discussion of issues in education policy theory to the transition from structural questions of power, domination and class-based analyses, towards theories of governance in the late-1980s/early-1990s (N. Rose and Miller 1992; Ozga 2009; Dean 2010). The chapter provides some contemporary context to the broad themes that have pulsated through contemporary English schooling during the past three decades, such as the effect of globalisation and international measurements on schooling. Moreover, it assesses the continuities and discontinuities between the 2010 coalition government (2010-2015, successive Conservative governments (2015; 2017-present) and the New Labour governments (1997, 2001, 2005). From here, I offer a broad historical overview of the school English since its inception in the early twentieth century, through to its place in the National Curriculum in 1988, and subsequent iterations. I use insights from both of these literatures to develop an analysis of the 2013 reforms to English.

1.1 Issues in Education Policy Research

Since the late-1980s, academics have found themselves in a dilemma over underlying, dynamic social conditions that have reduced the role of class inequality and state power as focal points of analysis. Before the advent of recent political circumstances (Brexit and Trump), social changes associated with globalisation and postmodernism had decentred the national state, which supposedly left us with the

challenge of identifying 'new rules of the social game' where 'old certainties, distinctions and dichotomies were [are] fading away' (Beck, Bonss, and Lau 2003, 3). This relegation of structure and class analysis has been compounded by successive politicians either wanting to create 'a classless society' (Major 1991) or making proclamations that 'the class war is over' (Blair 1999). Though as recent political events show, the failure to match this rhetoric by addressing the actual material factors that cause social inequality has led to class becoming a *visible* political issue once again (Anthony 2014).

This thesis accepts that class-based analyses still have their place; the decades-long failure to address the lack of progress on educational attainment for white working-class boys (Wigmore 2015) shows that class is *the* key indicator for success or failure. There is still value in rereading the class-based analyses that dominated much of the research into education before the 1980s, with researchers working on Freire's concept of "conscientization", or Bowles and Gintis's (2012 [1976]) ideas about the reproduction of the capitalist system in school structures and norms. This focus on class is especially relevant if we accept that there is 'conflict within a system of meritocracy which is heavily biased towards middle-class values' (Evans 2006, 12).

Because of its subject matter and my theoretical leaning, however, this thesis establishes itself within a tradition of numerous works that have developed within "policy sociology studies", since Bowe, Ball and Gold's (1992) work emphasised the different contexts that policy goes through during its "cycle". Importantly, these studies raise questions about the inflexions of micro-practices that influence the trajectory of mostly state-driven policy formulations (Hatcher and Troyna 1994, 156). Ball and Shilling wrote in their 1994 guest editorial in the *Journal of Education Policy*, that throughout the 70s and 80s, a divide had opened up between those fixated on the school and classroom on the one hand (interactionists) and economy on the other (structural Marxists) (Ball

and Shilling 1994). Instead, a strand of policy sociology that problematised policy "through several of its 'levels or 'dimensions' or 'moments' of activity and effect', whilst 'continuing to ask basic sociological questions about the relationship between educational practices and social inequalities", offered value (2).

I argue that policy is best explained through social theories that substantiate a more fluid definition of power and the state in their analyses. This line of thinking itself can be connected to broader works of social theory loosely organised around the name "governmentality studies" (N. Rose 1991; C. Gordon 1991; N. Rose and Miller 1992; Dean 2010 [1999]). These studies build on an array of books, lectures and interviews left by the late thinker Michel Foucault (1980; 2008). They draw attention to the idea that the state increasingly governs social actors through horizontal, networked forms aimed at shaping, guiding, and 'affecting the conduct of some person or persons' in their everyday practices at ground level (C. Gordon 1991, 2), and not in a linear, top-down capacity.

In his 1978-79 lecture series *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault outlines how this 'intensive and extensive development of government practice' has its roots in eighteenth-century state rationality (Foucault 2008, 28). He conceives that the emergence of the liberal state should be seen less as a political ideology, or representation of itself, but rather as a practice or 'way of doing things' (318). Government is better understood as an activity that 'consists in governing people's conduct' within a particular domain, such as through the freedom of the market, the freedom of discussion or expression (318). Unlike previous epochs, the state is no longer interested in just accumulating 'wealth,' 'power,' and 'population' for its ends; rather it wants to be the mediator in *interests*— such as people's actions—by negotiating the balance between say, 'social utility' and 'economic profit,' or 'basic rights' and the 'independence of the governed' (144). In order for this to continue, the

state needs to persistently find ways to 'produce freedom' so that it can be the apparatus to organise it (318).

Thinkers such as Nikolas Rose, Peter Miller and Mitchell Dean have taken this conceptual framework and advanced it to analyse how contemporary governance operates in an area such as public health, administration and education. Rather than focus on the political power of the macro-state, they urge us to consider what relations, in general, are established between 'political and other authorities,' and in particular: 'the funds, forces, persons, knowledge or legitimacy', that are utilised in order for governance to occur (N. Rose and Miller 1992, 177). For health workers, decisions are rarely successfully made or justified by an 'externally imposed plan' rather, effective government organisation occurs through its impetus to shape the 'professional codes, training, habit, moral allegiances, and institutional demands' (193). Even if this begins with the premise that social actors are free to think and act—say, that doctors can go about their professional daily business relatively unhindered—government is the 'activity that shapes the field of action' (understood here as the capacity of actions we hold in our working capacity) (Dean 2010, 21).

Jenny Ozga explains that a marked shift occurred in educational government during the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. She shows how government moved from a 'rule-governed processes' with 'centralised legal frameworks and shared assumptions' between key policy actors, educational researchers and institutions, to 'a goal-governed steering of outputs and outcomes, accompanied by the monitoring of targets' (Ozga 2009, 149). The governance turn in education, seen particularly throughout the rise of the *New Labour* government, brought with it a new focus on policy aimed at deregulating schools, whilst enhancing data and information systems and intelligent accountability frameworks (Miliband 2004, 3). The reasoning suggested that schools could remove bureaucracy to free up

time for teaching, whilst at the same time provide a robust self-evaluation process that allowed parents (and presumably political elites) to make better judgements about schools (12).

These processes of encouraging institutions to proliferate and share the information they create have helped to render schools and universities 'visible and calculable' to the gaze of the central government (Ozga 2008, 265). In trying to govern without seeming to govern, the central state has drawn on several policy technologies such as 'data harmonisation, quality benchmarking and standardisation,' in order to achieve its ends (266). This process goes deeper than just reform to institutional structures, to what Nikolas Rose describes as a process of 'governing the soul' (N. Rose 2005). By this, he means that our desire towards 'self-inspection,' and 'self-monitoring,' through our work and practice, leads us to 'evaluate ourselves according to the criteria provided for us by others' (10). By tracking our complex relationship with the human sciences, we can begin to explicate how contemporary government 'operates through the delicate and minute infiltration of the ambitions of regulation, into the very interior of our existence and experience as subjects' (11).

These theoretical insights help explain the development of "data infrastructures" in schools, driven by a 'government demand' to know about 'student outcomes,' and 'teacher quality' (Sellar 2015b, 771). Stephen Ball notes that 'teachers work extraordinarily hard to monitor and improve student performances' (2013a, 104). Increasingly sophisticated school software management tools, such as the *Pupil Asset* tool or SIMS (System Information Management Systems), have been developed and utilised to make sense of these calculabilities. As a result, there is scrutiny on 'teachers, students and schools, and pedagogies, procedures, performance, data and initiatives,' as they become 'objects and subjects to be focused on' (107). For example, a SIMS brochure for secondary schools claims that its product 'offers

much more than a world-class management information system' (Capita Sims 2015, 6). Not only does it track all-round performance, but once in the classroom, through its tools of 'electronic registration, traffic lights on tracking grids and report templates,' it becomes 'part of every teacher's daily routine'—for in today's system, 'schools cannot be outstanding with good teaching alone' (6). It is through this complex intersection between government, technology and practice that children and staff are implicated within a matrix of measurement and calculabilities.

International forms of measurement have become increasingly important at a global level, where they open up new policy references but are also transferable within the local context of schools and domestic policy-making. Steven Lewis and Bob Lingard suggest that research papers on Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in education have almost become a 'cottage industry in their own right' (Lewis and Lingard 2015, 621). For example, *The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD), through its use of international measurement tools such as PISA, offers an insight to this 'space-shifting' in practice, as it works to forge a 'dynamic process of connection and negotiation between people and places' (Lewis and Lingard 2015, 624). At one level, the OECD has helped to constitute reference societies such as Shanghai, Singapore and Finland, which gives nations and domestic governments a reason to look globally and to imagine themselves in the global race (Sellar and Lingard 2013, 468). On another level, however, PISA results are subject to 're-contextualization—either absorbed or adapted or silenced' or as ways to 'create new meanings and rules for local action' (Carvalho and Costa 2014, 640). Working at a contextual level gives the OECD a 'humanistic dimension' that helps to secure its expansion of 'explanatory power' and gives it more 'policy usefulness and impact' (Lewis and Lingard 2015, 624).

Extending our analyses beyond the scope of the national state can allow researchers to consider the effect of global policy networks by identifying the governing work that is done through the way policy moves or is moved (Ball 2016b). This task means paying attention to the activities of 'policy actors, discourses, conceptions, connections, agendas, resources and solutions of governance' (Ball 2016b, 549) and regularly ties in questions of global capital. As Lingard and Ozga have observed: 'globalisation foregrounds education in specific ways' as to connect it to 'competitive growth' (2007, 70). Ball, for instance, hones his sights on Pearson Education, 'the world's largest education company' (124). Its global reach into the US, UK, Africa and the Middle East means it has pre-tax profits of £5.7bn. Ball states that there is an increasing tendency within the promotion and advertising of companies like Pearson to 'position' themselves as providing solutions to the 'national policy problems' of 'raising standards' and achieving educational improvements through the talk of 'individual opportunity' and 'national competitiveness' (127). Much time is invested in engaging with privileged nodal actors who move policy ideas between national borders.

In this case, businesses like Pearson occupy a dominant role in a policy context, with aims towards developing a knowledge-economy (understood here as the process by which the 'generation' and 'exploitation' of knowledge plays a 'predominant role in the creation of wealth') (Brinkley et al. 2009, 4). The connection of these companies with privileged social actors can offer some insight into how educational ideas can be foregrounded. As the many constitutive actors that make up global capital connect themselves to educational pedagogy, curriculum and policy, through companies such as Pearson, it is worth thinking about how this affects the policy-making process. Consultancy companies, private providers, management software businesses, think-tanks and "flagship" schools, all help to make up the

growing voice of external social-actors influencing policy both 'within' and 'for' the state, through 'report writing, evaluations, advice, consultancy, and recommendations' (Ball 2012, 99). Pearson should be seen as a serious policy-actor in defining 'what cultural knowledge' is deemed most important and how they see their products 'invested' in the 'particular conceptions of educational process and organisation' (127). During the past ten years, the schools' minister Nick Gibb has been pushing for textbooks to play a bigger role in classroom teaching because they can provide 'a coherent, structured programme' (2014c). He has now made speeches to publishers telling them that 'schools will look to publishers for solutions (2014c); Pearson are well placed to take advantage of such an educational landscape.

1.2 Continuities and Discontinuities in UK Schooling Policy

It is between the shifting mechanisms of state governance and swinging global change that we find the space for articulating the broad themes that have penetrated the UK education system over the past thirty years. One way to think about this is to consider the continuities and discontinuities between the New Labour government and successive Conservative governments since 2010. Two prominent trends stand out: fundamental changes to school governance structures and new discourses across the domains of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Each of these provides some foundational context to the overall study.

Governance Issues

The landscape of school governance has changed rapidly since 2010. It is possible to point to the expansion of multi-academy trusts (MATS), which have clustered schools 'through partnerships and federations', altering the role of 'local government from deliverer to contractor of education services' (Wilkins 2016, 1). Robert Peal observes in his book *Changing Schools*, that the current academy programme built on previous work done by the former Labour minister Andrew Adonis, who 'established the current movement towards greater school autonomy'

when he oversaw the first academy programme in 2005 (Peal 2015, 6). Whereas Adonis created 204 academies during Labour's time in office, by 2015, over 60% of secondary schools and 14% of primary schools were no longer under local authority control (6). This is over 5000 schools. In 2017, 68.8% of secondary school pupils and 24.3% of primary school pupils, were taught in academies (Roberts 2017).

Under the coalition government, the rationale embedded in the initial City Academies programme was pushed faster and stretched further. Michael Gove started by introducing the 2010 Academies Act (DfE 2010b), which allowed successful state-maintained schools to apply for academy status. These academies have the opportunity to set their salary scales, working conditions for staff and do not have to follow the National Curriculum. The Act also allowed for entirely new schools called free schools to open. Free schools allowed parents, teachers or sponsors to apply to open their own state-maintained but 'officially independent school. Nick Gibb ties the expansion of academies and free schools to the idea of autonomy (2014b). For him, autonomy is not about 'government directives, committees of experts, quango worthies or national strategies', but rather giving 'academy trusts, charities, social enterprises and online communities'—essentially likeminded people, the freedom to shape the future of schools (Gibb 2014b).

Gove has been praised by some commentators for giving the education system unprecedented freedoms, that no 'future politician will be able to remove' (Peal 2015, 8). Gibb claims that the academies programme is emboldening civil society and allowing a 'thousand flowers to bloom' (2014b). In this sense, free schools and academies have been a central part of government policy supposedly aimed at allowing schools to 'innovate without central interference' (DfE 2016, 65). Andrew Wilkins, however, in his work on governor structures in multi-academy trusts, notes that the reorganisation has less to do with 'flourishing freedom to governors' and more about 'utilising that freedom to gain additional

control over and intervention in social and political life' (Wilkins 2016, 12).

Other critics of the academies programme have challenged it for the way it sidesteps the control of 'democratically elected bodies' (Walford 2014b, 265) and for its involvement in the continuing privatisation of education (Walford 2014a; Foster 2015; J. Turner 2015). Additionally, there have been some successful parent-led campaigns against primary school conversions, such as the one in Newham (Allen-Kinross 2018). The Conservative Party's ambition was for every school to begin the process towards academisation by 2020; this aim was redacted after there was opposition to the plans, including from their party councillors (Weale 2016).

Helen Gunter and Ruth McGinity's (2014) research explores how two different schools experienced the conversion from LEA to MAT sponsorship. The research demonstrated how the national policy worked through localised policy processes, where entrepreneurial sponsors and faith sponsors used the message of a 'crisis in public education' to provide 'solutions' to strengthen their local interests (307). Gunter and McGinity's central argument is that 'politics' and policy-makers are removing themselves from the education process by 'building markets for their ideas (faith groups) and products (entrepreneurs)' (309). In this way, the state enables enthusiastic professionals at the local level to become 'reform managers' to 'generate opportunities for elite professionals' in order to embed neoliberal projects—and fundamentally shape the field of action for school practitioners (Gunter and McGinity 2014; Dean 2010).

Within schools themselves, governance has aimed to usher forward ways of conceiving accountability regimes. John Furlong characterises the Labour government as taking on the role of an 'active state', and increasing 'managerialism' that aimed to get decisions about what to teach and how, made at 'national level' rather than by 'individual

teachers themselves' (2005, 120). In some respects, the Conservative governments have intensified Labour's ambition for deploying intelligent accountability systems. Where Gove has differed is in relation to the execution of such bureaucracy. According to him, New Labour had allowed too much data to go upwards to the state; he wanted more dispersion for parents and communities, so they could be 'sliced' and diced' by others to make a judgement on how well a school was performing (Gove 2012c). This rationale is conducive to a programme that has tried to pressure schools to perform using a system of parental choice and competition as its core markers.

The way the state has empowered new actors to run and govern schools has brought forward entrepreneurially-driven policy subjects. Wilkins refers to the new generation governors overseeing school management as "expert publics", who act as 'strategists, assessors and appraisers', whereby they are driven by the market 'as the exclusive arbitrator for defining and measuring the purpose and impact of what they do' (2016, 145). Whereas school leaders and governors have acted often independently of the central government, the contexts that schools work within nowadays has led to a greater emphasis on technical work such as auditing and performative accountability, rather than exercising a democratic, participatory and deliberative function. In this sense, the state has not provided any meaningful new autonomy for those involved with school governance but instead redefined the nature of responsibility. Even if schools are 'freer' than ever, it is worth considering what this freedom *actually* means for schools and teachers, and to the extent that states and policy-makers still retain a share in it, beyond setting the context. Tim Brighouse has noted that before the 1980s, government had 'three powers over schools' that included removing air raid shelters, deciding on training numbers for teachers and the ultimate decision on the size of school building programmes—

in 2015 there were nearly 2000 powers that the Secretary of State for Education could use (Brighouse quoted in M. Simons 2015).

Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy

Buoyed by a post Second World War self-confidence, nations such as the US and Britain were relatively inward-looking in their policy development. Policy sharing was confined to 'looking across the Atlantic,' or within colonial lines, rather than globally (Lingard and Sellar 2012, 475). Moreover, Britain considered itself a world leader in its advanced forms of data collection (475). Seller and Lingard remark, however, that around the publication of the 2006 PISA ranking, the Cameron opposition began utilising the UK's average placement as a political strategy to challenge what they saw as New Labour's inward complacency on educational standards (476). Whereas Blair and Brown had pointed to ever-increasing GCSE and SATS standards as a way of demonstrating educational progress, the Conservative leadership raised issues of grade inflation and the way schools were 'gaming the system', by getting children to select easier GCSEs to help the school move them up the league tables (Gove 2009). On entering government, the coalition government released the White Paper: *The Importance of Teaching*, which stated a more global priority: 'what really matters is how we're doing compared with our international competitors' (DfE 2010a, 1).

From very early on into the 2010 coalition, Michael Gove acted to cement the government's commitment to learning from education systems abroad. In his view, a comparative assessment of schools from Singapore to Sweden demonstrated that key variables were present in the success of schools in these countries[9]. In particular, this included increased 'autonomy to individual schools', and the ability for 'school

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[9] Exley and Ball (2011) argue that policy borrowing was done in a decontextualized way. For example, Swedish free schools actually have a National Curriculum, whereas in England they do not (106).

leaders [to be] empowered to innovate' (Gove 2010a). Policy-makers were seen to be making trips to places such as Sweden and Shanghai. On one such return, Gove wrote in *The Telegraph* that pupils in the Far East were working 'at an altogether higher level' than UK ones (Gove 2010d). As a result, he would urge Ofqual 'to peg their tests to the world's most rigorous' and penalise ones that 'devalued qualifications' (Gove 2010d). In his words, the Conservatives had 'embarked on a Long March', a 'cultural revolution,' in order to improve standards (Gove 2010d). This pattern has continued under the watch of the former education secretary Nicky Morgan and the schools' minister Nick Gibb. In a 2015 speech, Gibb referred to the BBC documentary: *Are our Kids Tough Enough? Chinese School*, (a show that crudely attempted to pit British and Chinese teaching methods against one another), and lamented the senior leadership's reluctance to accept the 'Chinese teaching methods', despite their 'effectiveness' being 'unequivocal' (Gibb 2015c).

There have been some precise changes in curriculum and assessment since 2010. In 2013, Gove made a statement to the House of Commons outlining several reforms to primary and secondary education (Gove 2013f). At the primary level, a prescriptive curriculum, for all maintained schools was developed by policymakers. It states that all primary pupils must learn a foreign language (DfE 2015) and following a consultation on whether or not to implement phonics screening at year one and two, it was introduced in 2015. At the secondary level, curriculum changes in core subjects were implemented in September 2015, and exam testing in these include extending the use of writing and removing internal school-led assessment wherever it was possible (Gove 2013f). The result of these interventions, along with ministers' interest in American intellectuals such as E.D. Hirsch (1988) and Daniel Willingham (2006; Willingham 2009a), who have described the importance of core-

knowledge curriculums, has influenced the new national curriculum for those schools across the board.

Conservative politicians Michael Gove, Nick Gibb and Nicky Morgan, have all drawn on the work of educator E.D. Hirsch to justify a more knowledge-driven curriculum, particularly in the secondary school core subjects and at the primary school level. Writing in 1988, and within an American context, Hirsch lamented that schools were failing to teach all children 'a shared body of information' that was possessed by literate members of society (Hirsch 1988, 110). For Hirsch, this core cultural literacy is an entry point to more complex forms of comprehension. Cultural literacy also provides a cohesive function by providing a relatively stable vocabulary that allows people throughout the land to communicate with one another (26). In Hirsch's view, schools have been stuck by progressivism that prioritises teaching children how to think critically, at the expense of offering a specific 'factual curriculum' (Hirsch 2006, 11). In his view, a task such as thinking critically is 'not content-independent' and needs concrete and direct knowledge about a variety of subjects to do it well (12). Conservative politicians have used these ideas to design and justify new curriculums and assessments in subjects across the board. Nick Gibb says in a speech, 'core knowledge must be central to any effective curriculum' because previous attempts to 'teach skills without knowledge or to develop proficiency without practice, were always doomed to failure' (2015c).

The government has focused on trying to move away from the 'back to basics approach' rhetoric by situating it as informed by clear evidence about "what works". Conservative ministers have drawn on educator Hirsch and cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham to position their policy in line with an 'evidence-based' research movement. Willingham's argument centres on the idea that teachers cannot teach skills without extensive factual knowledge are influenced by his research into cognitive science (Willingham 2009b, 25). Policy-makers

have used research by the Core Knowledge Foundation, an independent organisation set up by E.D. Hirsch in 1986, to add direct studies to their thinking. Ministers have made many speeches suggesting that the previous "quack theories" about 'multiple intelligences' or 'kinaesthetic learners' are being replaced by a 'more rigorous and scientific approach to learning' (Gove 2014b)

Policy-makers in the DfE have made references to the central importance of teachers in producing evidence-based research (though certain types of data collection). Gove and Gibb have regularly referenced people like Daisy Christodoulou, Robert Peal and Joe Kirby, who are all either practicing teachers (or have been), to strengthen their claim about learning from the profession and 'driving evidence-based change' from the bottom up (Gove 2014b). In 2013, the government commissioned Ben Goldacre to debunk the 'pseudo-scientific myths and fallacies' that have not helped educators (2013, 18). Flipping between the practices of the medical profession and teaching, Goldacre writes that teachers drawing on their independent research could make teaching 'an evidence-based profession' like health practice, 'in just one generation' and in so doing, increase professional independence from the meddling of politicians (18).

The prospect of teachers working in a more autonomous profession has been a particularly enduring theme in the past few years. Robin Alexander reminds us, however, that since its inception as an idea, the government has deployed an aggressive hostility to diverging conceptions of pedagogy and learning (Alexander 2016, 14). The government has also kept the profession 'on message', by drawing on "the raft of so-called 'expert groups' whose generous complement of policy-compliant members produce supposedly 'independent' reports (14). These ideas touch on the very central concern about what it means to be a teacher, both for the state and at an individual level; this is a reoccurring theme throughout the thesis. As I will outline in the next

section, school English has not been short of political interference throughout its development into a core subject.

1.3 The Contested Terrain of School English

This section offers a historical, political and critical discussion of school English. Doing so allows me to provide a brief overview of the subject's development from the early twentieth century to the most recent reforms. Such a task brings together ideas from several academics and education secretaries; it draws on literary criticism and key reports. Finally, working through the reoccurring debates around the status of "the canon", I will show how English becomes an object for discussion on the political landscape: encompassing issues around the function of the canon for the curriculum.

A Brief History

English is considered a relatively young school subject. It was only in 1904 that the Board in Education made a compulsory directive to all state secondary schools to provide courses in English literature and language. Its movement into a coherent and recognisable subject took much longer and faced several difficulties. David Shayer (2007) outlines a series of "fallacies" that dogged the development of English teaching during its nascent years. For example, many teachers were often converted classicists who would fall back on their Classical curriculum, and this resulted in literary study being reduced to 'allusion hunting', 'figure of speech spotting and paraphrasing' or mere 'composition' (6). Moreover, there was often a sole focus on the importance of older texts (the old English fallacy), an expectation for pupils to 'imitate, copy and reproduce' (imitative fallacy), and, in distinctively Victorian fashion, literature was used as a means to purvey moral lessons to children who were seen as 'little adults' (moral fallacy) (6–24).

These problematic fallacies brought together many enthusiasts of English interested in developing a more humane conception of the

subject. This impetus for a different type of English resulted in the creation of *The English Association*, which acted as support for an 'autonomous epistemic community for English teachers' (Ball 1982, 4). This group wanted to set out English as a specific subject that 'counter[ed] the stultifying and conservative influences of the classic tradition' (4). Through *The English Association* there began a collective drive to make English a distinct part of the school syllabus. The Association continued to publish reports and articles throughout the 1910 and 20s on wide-ranging issues such as on the dispute about grammar, the role of literature in the subject and where the pupil fitted into the overall learning process (Ball 1982, 5).

As the century wore on, other institutions and people became prominent as part of the growing "epistemic community" that helped to influence the development of English as a school subject (Ball 1982). Arthur Quiller-Couch became the first professor of English at Cambridge and sat on the Newbolt Committee—a 1921 report commissioned to look into the contemporary state of English in schools.[10] Following Couch, there was the continued rise of the so-called 'Cambridge School', spearheaded by the likes of I A Richards, F. R. Leavis and George Sampson. Leavis looked to utilise English in the schools and universities as a way to 'mobilise the symbolic force of cultural tradition', in order to offer a check and control on the increasing 'material' and 'mechanical development of society' (Doyle 2003, 96). George Sampson, who was also steeped in the 'elite' notion of literature's humanising effects and role as a 'basis of opposition' to 'British cultural destruction' helped to further articulate the Arnoldian Literary-Critical Tradition (Ball 1982, 112). Both Leavis and Sampson attempted to create a discernible impact through training teachers and lecturers to take the Cambridge School view into schools, and many of

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[10] The Newbolt Report stated that English was being neglected in schools and should form part of the total educational experience and that Literature should have a central space in this (Newbolt 1921).

their followers helped to publish articles and textbooks. As a sum, they formed a cluster of influential people including Fred Inglis, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Denys Thompson.

In 1947, James Britton and Percival Gurrey formed the London Association for the Teaching of English (LATE), a 'remarkably influential subject network' that provided a collaborative outlet for post-war London teachers and academics concerned with forming a new model of English teaching (Gibbons 2017, 24). Gibbons, for instance, draws on correspondence from LATE members at the time they successfully lobbied the London Board to allow an alternative syllabus to be taught (Gibbons 2009). LATE was eventually subsumed by the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE). NATE members looked to move the influence away from the Cambridge School insistence on literature and more towards concerns around the 'naturally occurring, written and oral language of schoolchildren' (Ball 1982, 17). Through the rising influence of NATE, Ball located the emergence of a 'socio-linguistic paradigm' which was typified through important works by its members such as James Britton, Nancy Martin, Connie Rosen, and M. A. K. Halliday, and concerned itself with the 'naturally occurring, written and oral language of schoolchildren' (17). Conferences and publications were focused around issues of language teaching in the classroom and propounded the idea that English teaching should 'lay stress' on the need 'to practise children in a wide range of styles and written situations' to deal with 'personal and emotional experiments' (Shayer 2007, 168).

As Cambridge School advocates and NATE members continued to push their views on the schooling system, *The Bullock Report: A Language for Life* (1975) was commissioned by the government. The report focused on reading, but it did so by weaving in other social and cognitive factors to demonstrate how it should not be studied in isolation, or as a discrete skill. The report's scope was broad and included concerns about asocial

issues, such as early-years intervention by highlighting how home visits might be used to help form partnerships between lower social class families and the authorities. In line with many NATE members' views, oracy was encouraged, traditional grammar downplayed, and there was a strong recommendation that secondary schools needed to develop 'a language policy across the curriculum' (8).

The report was conscious to avoid the 'moral fallacy' present in the very earliest attempts to teach English, and at one point quotes George Sampson (writing 50 years before the report) that 'reading Blake to a class is not going to turn boys into saints' (Bullock 1975, 124). The report also contended that literature could offer 'personal and moral growth', and this was grounded on a 'soundly based tradition' (124). Furthermore, it recommended multi-media approaches to help bring books alive; a teacher might get children to discuss the texts *they* have read, and even consider taping 'trailer passages on cassettes' for them to 'listen to on headsets' (128). Importantly, at the level of teachers' attitudes towards English, the report highlighted a continuing conflict in defining English as a subject:

> *Some teachers see English as an instrument of personal growth, going so far as to declare that 'English is about growing up'. They believe that the activities which it involves give it a special opportunity to develop the pupil's sensibility and help him to adjust to the various pressures of life. Others feel that the emphasis should be placed on direct instruction in the skills of reading and writing and that a concern for the pupil's personal development should not obscure this priority. There are those who would prefer English to be an instrument of social change.*

> (Bullock 1975, 4)

This pluralism at the centre of English in schools is well documented and appears in succeeding official reports on English (see Cox 1989, 60). Bethan Marshall captures it well in her book *English Teachers – The Unofficial Guide,* which conceptualises five philosophies of English that teachers hold. These include Critical Dissenters, Pragmatists, Old

grammarians, Technicians and Liberals. Marshall constructs her philosophies of English teaching through close readings of Brian Cox and Stephen Ball, amongst others (Ball and Lacey 1980; Abbs 1982). Critical dissenters are said to be interested in 'critical literacy' through the way they emphasise the 'political context and connotations of all literature' (Marshall 2000, 14). Pragmatists share some values with critical dissenters but take a pragmatic approach to work with the system—getting pupils ready for testing 'even though they [do] not agree with them' (62). Old grammarians are the most 'obvious inheritor' of the work of Leavis, where literature is about 'personal growth' both 'emotionally and in terms of life chances' (6). Their focus on grammar is apparent but is more concerned with facilitating language than correctness (7). Technicians will encourage pupils to hone their skills and practise spelling, grammar and punctuation. They believe working on Standard English is important because it allows pupils to 'effectively and accurately' (12). Finally, Liberals share with the Arnoldian tradition, the sense that English alone, is the only space in the curriculum 'for unlocking doors', 'exploring thoughts and emotions' and as a way to 'promote empathy, understanding and tolerance' (10).

The notion of "many Englishes" has been around since the nascent stages in the subject's development (for example, through the intervention of the English Association), and is present in precursory documents to the 1988 National Curriculum, such as the Cox Report. This evidence suggests that there is a deep and embedded pluralism at the subject's centre and is typified through research that demonstrates a wide variation between different conceptions of English in school departments after the post-war period (Medway 2005; Medway and Kingwell 2010; Hardcastle 2013; Yandell 2014). Peter Medway and Patrick Kingwell point to an English department based in London, that under leadership Harold Rosen in the late 50s and early 60s, articulated

a conception of English pedagogy that started with a pupil's experience (2010).

Considering all this, neither the development of the subject or its history can be understood as a linear and unproblematic process. More often than not, it ends up playing out on the political landscape. As Ball (1982) notes, any paradigm for English is realised in terms of its 'adjustment' to the 'needs' and 'forces' of the social structure, and as a result of the 'strategies', 'pressures' and 'influences' of certain groups that have an investment in how English is taught (14). This commitment is visible through the efforts of people like Leavis and groups such as the English Association and NATE, who attempted to push their agenda on to the schooling system. It was Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, however, through its Education Reform Act of 1988, and the subsequent implementation of the National Curriculum, that set about a genuinely ambitious and lasting impact on how English was to be delivered and assessed in maintained schools in England and Wales.

The 1988 National Curriculum and its Subsequent Iterations

The National Curriculum, along with its policy for national assessment, was introduced as part of the Conservative Party's Education Reform Act 1988. Richard Daugherty (1995) argues that the stage was set for politicians interested in centrally controlling the curriculum when the former Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan (1976) used his Ruskin Speech to signal that Local Authorities and schools should no longer determine curriculum matters. As debates continued throughout the 70s and 80s, a consensus was growing around the need to move towards a more 'interventionist approach' (Daugherty 1995, 7). Ideologically, the desire for central 'control' went against the grain of thinking set by Margaret Thatcher and Keith Joseph (then education secretary). Both felt more comfortable with the notion that the wisdom of parental choice would raise standards rather than centralising control; however,

the amalgamation of think tank work[11] and numerous green papers[12] tipped the balance towards a consensus for forming a central standard curriculum and assessment.

Thatcher appointed Kenneth Baker 1986 as education secretary, and he subsequently ordered two reports for looking at the development of the English curriculum specifically: first the Kingsman Report (1988) with its focus on providing a model for teaching English as a language, and secondly, the more holistic Cox Report (1989). The Kingsman Report brings together a model that combines 'forms of English language', such as sounds and letters, a focus on 'communication and comprehension', a need to understand 'acquisition and development' of language by the child whilst paying attention to 'historical and geographical variation' (Kingman 1988, 117). As well as offering some clarity for the importance of English teaching as a stand-alone subject, the Report stated that all departments concerned with language should 'develop a co-ordinated policy for language teaching (69). The Cox Report, led by Professor Brian Cox, then followed on from the Kingsman Report to 'advise' the government 'on appropriate attainment targets and programmes of study for English', for its introduction into the National Curriculum (Cox 1989, 5).

Before chairing the Report, Brian Cox had had a long history of engaging with English as a school subject. He had been instrumental in the creation and distribution of several infamous 'Black Papers'— pamphlets, published in the *Critical Quarterly*, that had decried the excesses of progressive education in Britain throughout the 60s and

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[11] Daugherty draws our attention to the influence of Stuart Sexton and his book *Our Schools—A radical policy*, where he argued that parental wisdom was the best change for improving schools (Sexton quoted in Daugherty, 1995, p11). It was the Hillgate Group though, that seemed to have the most influence by arguing that when it came to the curriculum, 'busy parents [were] usually too busy to ruminate on the niceties of the curriculum' (Hillgate quoted in Daugherty 1995, 11).

[12] See '(DES 1985) Better Schools.

70s[13]. By the time he was allowed to shape school English through the Cox Report, he had already stated that there was an 'urgent need' for 'new Conservative initiatives in education' (Cox 1981, 112). Despite being entrusted with chairing the working committee, the final product did not enthuse right-wing politicians. Writing about the reception of the Report in his book *Cox on Cox* (Cox 1991), he states that Kenneth Baker 'very much disliked the Report', mostly because he had wanted a short Report with a 'strong emphasis on grammar, spelling and punctuation' (11). Even though there was a severe threat that parts of it would be left out entirely, it was ultimately published with the recommendation chapters on attainment added to the very top. Cox maintained, however, despite being unpopular with the Conservative leadership, the report was well received by the teaching profession and people who had to implement it in the national curriculum.

As Cox anticipated, things like the assessment process would have to be developed through trial and error and would need to be re-evaluated as it was implemented (Cox 1991). Writing at the time of the latest 2013 review of English teaching, Simon Gibbons informs us that the most current review is at least the 'fifth such review' in under 25 years (2013b, 138). The first review was undertaken in 1993 by Sir Ron Dearing as a response to observations made by teachers 'that the curriculum was unwieldy' (Roberts 2014, 6). Dearing wrote up his Review in 1994 and recommended that a statutory order be implemented to 'reduce prescriptivism' to allow for more professional judgement (7). English remained central to the curriculum and was not overly affected by the Review, other than that English attainment targets were recommended to be reduced by 159 to 83 (7). The hours spent on direct English

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[13] Cox co-edited *Fight for Education* (1968) *and Crisis in Education* (1969)—both made a substantial impact on the debate around challenging the assumptions of progressive education at the time and draw on the likes of Kingley Amis and Robert Conquest.

teaching remained higher than all other subjects (180 hours at KS1 and 90 hours at KS3).

Clyde Chitty remarks that New Labour was mostly keen to continue with the policy of 'amending' and 'reformulating' the National Curriculum structure left to them after John Major's government (Chitty 2013, 149). The National Curriculum was a bulky and detailed document of 85 pages. English connected with a whole host of recommended initiatives and national strategies, such as 'literacy hour' in primary schools (Eason 2009). As John Furlong notes, the central government was keen to make interventions on 'all aspects of teaching and the day-to-day running of schools'; it even offered 2000 model lesson plans that could be downloaded (Furlong 2005, 125).

Throughout New Labour's time in government, there were three significant reviews of the National Curriculum. The first review occurred in 1999 and resulted in 'further slimming down of prescribed content' and the 'introduction of an overt statement of aims and purposes' (Roberts 2014, 7). In a 2002 Green Paper, the former Education and Skills minister Estelle Morris outlined her belief that the twentieth-century education system 'was too often a one-size-fits-all structure' and that Labour would continue to reform the system (DfES 2002, 3). In attempting to guarantee 'economic prosperity' with 'social justice for all', Labour would ensure that the education system would command the confidence of every young person and every parent. The system would match the 'needs of the knowledge community' and twin academic achievement with a strong basis for citizenship and inclusion (4-5). The second review in 2005 once again encouraged slimming down on prescribed content emphasised 'cross-curricular themes, skills and personalised learning. Finally, Jim Rose conducted a 'root and branch' review of the primary curriculum in 2007 and published his results in 2009. Once again, the key concern was that teachers were being given too much prescription and were not able to teach the content in-depth

(J. Rose 2009, 10). This final report had a minimal effect when the government changed just a year later.

Since 2010, English has become a focus for ministers once again. At a surface level, there are many continuities with the New Labour approach to curriculum, despite the rhetoric otherwise. There has been a strengthening of phonics provision (Gibb 2015c), and they have intensified David Blunkett's (2000) call for more research on "what works". Where the Conservatives have tried to distinguish their approach is regarding how much guidance is provided by the central government, both to qualified teachers and those training new ones. The English secondary curriculum itself is seven pages and ministers have talked about giving teachers the 'unprecedented freedom to teach as they see fit'—a claim that I will examine throughout this thesis (Gibb 2016d). In terms of content, Gove has criticised New Labour's modular approach as being fragmentary (2012h); for English, this means teaching whole novels and not just extracts and drawing on a supposedly richer number of texts (Gibb 2016c). As I will discuss, these ideas have been conceptualised within a combination of neo-conservative and neo-liberal frames: twinning ideas of providing 'our island's story' (Gove 2010b), with a dogged insistence that autonomy and choice can improve standards and outcomes (Gibb 2015g).

English is a contested subject, and it has become an important battleground for Conservative politicians since 2010. In *Chapter Three,* I articulate how the "Gove reforms" try to co-opt a version of subject English as "liberal". As Oliver Belas and Neil Hopkins have recently stated, English has always been about national and personal identity, and by implication, citizenship (in the broad, non-curricular sense' (2019, 326). It most recently finds itself stuck in an 'exclusionary and assimilatory' policy environment (320) where the subject's liberal impulse has to compete with a crisis of liberalism as a result of 'populism, radicalisation or apathy' (320). The literary canon is often a

key site of ambiguity (whether imagined 'diverse and pluriform' or 'univocal and monolithic') (320). The next section works through this idea by providing more context to debates around the canon.

The Contested Canon: Politics and school English

Much academic and political commentary around the canon[14] has been provoked by perceived ongoing cultural crises, (Arnold 1865; Leavis 1933; Eliot and Kermode 1975; Eliot 1988). These critics saw the important role of a specific literary heritage in 'preserving critical judgement' in an age of 'cultural and spiritual decline' (Kolbas 2001, 122). There have been concerted efforts to emphasise the role of 'good' culture (and especially literature) to initiate the 'slow climb back' from the 'cultural trough' (I A Richards quoted in Leavis 1933, 19), from Arnold's "the best that has been thought and said" (Arnold 1865), to Leavis's 'vague hope' of recovery against mass-culture and the 'triumph of the machine' (Leavis 1933). These are the recognisable appeals Michael Gove makes when he says he is concerned that curriculum under New Labour has prioritised 'relevance over rigour' (2013d). After all: 'Stephenie Meyer cannot hold a flaming pitch torch to George Eliot. There is a Great Tradition of English Literature - a canon of transcendent works - and Breaking Dawn is not part of it' (2013d).

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[14] In his book *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon*, Dean Kolbas traces the notion of the canon back to the Ancient Greece. It was here that the terms *kanna* (types of reed or straight, firm stalks of marsh plants) and its related word *kanon*, 'metaphorically and metonymically' meaning 'straight rod, bar, ruler, as well as a rule, standard and model', were used to articulate a certain standard of preciseness (Kolbas 2001, 12). As the concept developed into the fifth century B.C, it took on meaning in architecture (right measure) and in the arts (correct proportion); Kolbas states that this 'developed most explicitly' in relation to the sculptor Polykleitos, who perfected a technique of 'precise mathematical measurements' and 'ideal proportions' that could be followed by other sculptors (12). Moreover, the *kanon* was deployed specifically as a 'measure of moral behaviour' in Euripides's plays, and in philosophy, first with Plato's idea of 'truth', and after this, the Epicureans claimed the canon as a 'moral and conceptual ideal' (14).

Stephen Ball, Alex Kenny and David Gardiner (1990) write that throughout its history, English teaching has seen various shifts in emphasis and has been underpinned by 'moral panics' and 'political crises' for the establishment (56). New paradigms in thinking about English (such as Leavisite discourse, or LATE) are usually followed by a series of 'official responses, reports, etc.' that do the work of 'reworking or adapting' aspects of these movements in order to frame the policy for schools (56). For instance, the Leavisite paradigm of literature found its way into the Bullock Report, with its focus on English as a 'civilising power which can foster 'personal and moral growth' (Bullock 1975, 125). Moreover, in the 1960s and 70s, LATE, under the watch of Douglas Barnes, Harold Rosen and John Dixon, had tried to expand the notion of literature and the canonical tradition to reflect changes in thinking about pedagogy, the forces of multiculturalism in Britain, and concerns around changing pupil demographics. For instance, it tried to craft out a definition of literature to include a range of broad media sources and to include poetry and literature of the West Indies, Africa and Asia, that put the 'authentic culture of the child' at its centre (Ball, Kenny, and Gardner 1990, 58).

Movements can sometimes be used by political parties to point to 'crises' too. As a result of the characterisation of such ideas in Cox's Black Papers, English teaching was implicated in being a major factor in the 'crisis of comprehensive education' (Ball, Kenny, and Gardner 1990, 62). By the 1980s, the critique against progressive education was basically 'government policy' with a fixation on a standard canon of literature, which emphasised that the great works should be read and that a literary and cultural heritage should be fostered (70).

Not satisfied, Conservative education minister, Kenneth Baker set up both the Kingman Report and the Cox Report in order to address the continuing perceived failures in school English. Both reports, however, now seemed receptive to some of the broader changes that were

happening around them. The Kingsman Report explicitly pays attention to the 'revolutions in literary theory' made by advancements in structuralism and post-structuralism, especially in getting teachers to think about the 'relationship between the structures of language and the structures of our culture' (Kingman 1988, 12). The Cox Report goes further by suggesting that teachers should retain a 'considerable measure of freedom' in choosing literature for pupils and should be mindful of their pupil's interests (Cox 1989, 115). Furthermore, it called on Examining Groups to 'extend the scope of what is traditionally regarded as "the canon" of English Literature', in order to recognise that 'the richness of cultural diversity' is a rewarding part of studying literature (197). Keeping with this, Cox refused to nominate any key texts in his report and left this open to teachers and exam boards to decide.

Tracing New Labour's early days, and its view on 'culture' and the canon, David Buckingham and Ken Jones state that not much seemed to shift, with David Blunkett emphasising that schools should focus on 'back to basics' in their literacy and numeracy (Buckingham and Jones 2001, 2). Furthermore, television, popular culture and even traditional arts subjects continued to be marginalised in the curriculum, though there was more opportunity for teachers to work with other media such as film. The 1999 (and revised in 2004) National Curriculum for KS3 and KS4 includes a section on media and moving images and speaks pupils knowing 'how the nature and purpose of media products influence content and production' (DfES 1999, 46). It also talks about how pupils should on 'the impact of electronic communication on written language' (45).

Bethan Marshall writes that New Labour inextricably connected English with 'the standards debate' and pushed a functional version of the subject that focused on skills, competencies and technical terminology that applied to outside work (Marshall 2004, 68). Further, John Yandell

points to two phases in New Labour's programme. The first was national strategies and the focus on "standards not structures"; the second, later approach was the 'accent' on 'creativity and diversity' (Yandell 2010, 114). Along with the focus on cross-curricular themes, this was evident through literature anthologies. For example, *Different Cultures* was released in 2004 by AQA, and this offered several poems in different dialects and from across many different cultures. Labour's later 2008 programme of study, makes clear that along with canonical authors, teachers should be open to fostering cultural diversity in the classroom (DFCS 2008).

1.4 The 2013 Reforms: Neoliberalism and cultural conservatism

The new GCSE English *Programme for Study* is a substantially slimmed down document of seven pages. On questions of curriculum, it stipulates the statutory guidance for exam boards and schools to provide pupils with at least one Shakespeare text, poetry since 1789, 'including representative Romantic poetry', works from 19th, 20th and 21st centuries and a 'wide range of high-quality, challenging, classic literature and extended non-fiction, such as essays, reviews and journalism' (DfE 2014, 5). The curriculum also stipulates the development of (amongst other things) writing skills such as note-taking, drafting and 'judiciously' selecting 'evidence' and 'structural and organisational features including rhetorical devices, to reflect audience, purpose and context' (DfE 2014, 6). The reforms include a heightened emphasis on spelling, punctuation and grammar in the language exams (DfE 2013c, 6). Given that almost all schools provide a GCSE qualification, academy freedoms to move away from the curriculum are unlikely to have any effect at KS4, where the four exam boards (AQA, Edexcel, OCR and WJEC) set texts in line with statutory guidance. The wider English curriculum is, however, supposed to enable teachers to pursue their 'professional freedom' in teaching the texts that they want (DfE 2016, 90). This professional freedom is to be supplemented with

government-backed initiatives to provide 'evidence-based teaching materials, textbooks and resources' to help teachers to deliver the new curriculum and to save them time from having 'to reinvent the wheel' (DfE 2016, 90).

How should we make sense of these curriculum reforms in light of the overall programme discussed in this literature review? Unlike Kenneth Baker's tunnel vision on spelling, punctuation and grammar (Cox 1991, 11), or the economy-driven, skills focus under New Labour, epitomised by Charles Clarke's comments that learning for its own sake was a 'bit dodgy' (Vasagar and Smithers 2003), Gove happily defends Arnoldian and Leavisite traditions[15] at the same time as mobilising the performative tools of the neoliberal order. Sometimes he carefully separates them in his speeches, and at other times he is happy to conflate them. In a speech on the effectiveness of examinations, he manages to do both. Gove starts with a challenge to the inventor James Dyson's comments that studying poetry is a 'self-indulgent' and 'useless luxury', in a world where young people need to apply themselves 'to matters technical' (Gove 2012e).

Biting back at those MPs that demand literary texts in the classroom should be 'relevant' rather than 'revelatory', is supposedly an example of 'rationing knowledge' (Gove 2012e)[16]. English literature fits in the liberal education corpus, along with mathematics, science, art and music in introducing children to the 'highest expressions of human thought and creativity' (Gove 2012e). It is a vital ingredient for securing a healthy democracy and a sharpened citizenry, where education is a

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[15] For Arnold, this would be learning for its own sake and maintaining the posterity of quality texts in passing on the best that has been thought and said (Arnold 1865, viii). Whereas, for Leavis, it is resisting massification and also practising practical criticism and activities such as to giving students 'sheets of anonymised tests for analysis and dating' (D. Ellis 2013, 23).

[16] Gibb has also referred to the crude twinning of the education system to utility as 'philistinism'(Gibb 2014a).

'good in itself – beyond – indeed above – any economic, social and political use to which it might be put' (Gove 2012e):

> *And even apparently frivolous exercises - like the study of French lesbian poetry - can develop the mind in a way every bit as rigorous and useful as any other study... Not, of course, if the study of these tests are faddish exercises in rehearsing sexual politics. But if the study of poetry occurs within the discipline of proper literary criticism, with an understanding of metre and rhythm, an appreciation of the difference between sonnet and villanelle and a knowledge of the canon so we know where influences arose and how influences spread then there are few nobler pursuits... so - having come out - through the medium of French lesbian poetry - as an unapologetically romantic believer in liberal learning - education for its own sake - let me now explain why the best way to advance this liberating doctrine is through... regular, demanding, rigorous examinations.*

(Gove 2012e)

Here is English, "removed" from the ugliness of politics and set in its "proper" literary discipline. It combines an argument for characterising the 'sublime, the beautiful and the original', of never depriving access of this culture to anyone, whilst suggesting that the most effective way to secure all this is through a high-stakes linear examination (Gove 2012e). The centrality of a static definition of knowledge is the lynchpin which works to secure the argument for a rational, "evidence-based" approach to English pedagogy. This authority is secured by the references to current advancements in our understanding of learning, which has been made by cognitive behavioural psychology. Thus the 2016 white paper states that the curricular reforms set out: 'a core body of knowledge in a format designed to maximise pupil understanding and minimise confusion, giving teachers professional autonomy over how to teach' (DfE 2016, 89).

Both Gove and Gibb have relayed their debt to E.D. Hirsch and Daniel Willingham, both of whom have advocated knowledge-driven curricular. According to Gibb, the focus on knowledge-pedagogy

characterises a curriculum that has 'carefully sequenced knowledge at its heart' (Gibb 2016e). This "sequencing" suggests itself as a relatively abstract conceptualisation of curriculum and teaching practice, by imbuing teachers and learners with a cultural conservative moral compass and a neoliberal rationalist toolkit. Such practices and arguments combine a rhetorical argument for demonstrating "what works", with utilitarian, and muscular liberalist views for delivering social justice to all pupils. As John Yandell states, this approach does more than just distinguish itself from new Labour's orientation towards skills; rather, it positions itself as the 'high road to social justice' (2017, 249). Its power for English, in particular, is that it allows teachers to understand their subject as having many faces. Through conceiving of a knowledge curriculum, teachers may at any one time, understand their practice as providing moral tuition, passing on the English cultural heritage (Gove 2010b), equipping young people with an employable skill set (Gove 2011c), or providing the cultural capital that has been the 'preserve of a social elite' (Gibb 2016d).

The Many Worlds of the 2013 English Reforms

With this in mind, it is therefore not enough to say that the Gove's version of knowledge pedagogy and Hirschian cultural literacy captures the subordination of the social and moral for the economic concerns of globalism, or craft for the technical. Its effectiveness comes from the fact it can fuse different conceptions (social, moral, rationalist, economic) in order to conceive of English teaching in a new mode. For instance, Ronen Shamir has referred to the market-embedded morality in business, where a form of social capitalism emerges as a result of neoliberal practices that moralise markets (2008) and Glenn Savage has referred to the attempt to place the concept of 'equity' in schools, within a moral and capitalistic enterprise (Savage 2011; Savage 2013). Both examples show how neoliberal driven policies can gain energy through the self-work of professionals—that is, providing new ways for subjects

to understand themselves and not just hollowing out their subjectivities.

On various occasions throughout this thesis I will borrow from Boltanski and Thévenot (1999; 2006) the idea that actors negotiate from a variety of "world-views", often simultaneously, when justifying themselves and advancing their positions. These "world-views" or "orders of justification" (six are posited in total) bring together how different positions exist within a single space, such as an institution. A range of discourses, rationalities and logics help construct these world-views. Boltanski and Thévenot draw on empirical everyday disputes and utilise classical political philosophy to map the grammar in each world to frame these everyday disputes (Giulianotti and Langseth 2016, 135). Boltanski and Thévenot use 'management texts and "how-to" guides to 'pin down objects, subjects and relations in each world' (135). More broadly though, the high level of generality of these *states of worthiness* serves as 'reference points' or can contribute towards 'the coordination of action of others' when an actor puts forward a 'worldview' for valuing the importance of a position (2006a 141). Some of these worlds become stronger for justifying or explaining the position of an actor at different times. In an attempt to advance justifiable arguments, social actors refer to the 'the common good', something which constitutes a principle 'superior to persons and can equate equivalence among them' (Boltanski 2012, 14).

This gives us a resource to think about how politicians or policy-makers working in a unique institution also bring together several different views in their justifications. Referring to the work of Bevir and Rhodes, it is possible to think about how different 'traditions' are utilised simultaneously. Take, for instance, Gove's insistence that the protection of liberal art is best served by a high-stakes linear exam, which can be abstracted to represent the nation-state in world league tables (i.e. PISA). Boltanski and Thévenot refer to three world-views that serve to

help explain this example. Firstly, the 'Inspired World' refers to an appreciation of the 'inspiration', as the *illumination* that takes over and *transforms* us and manifests itself in *feeling*s and *passions*, and is experienced as *excitement*, *terror*, or *fascination* (2006, 159). Our artists are the most inspired; they generate '*warmth, originality,* and *creativity*' and they alone accept the risks of failure when pursuing their creative successes (162). We can see this form of understanding in Gove's rhetoric when he defends literature as 'providing the highest expressions of human thought and creativity' (Gove 2012e) and in his preference for Romanticism, which has had prominent coverage in the GCSE curriculum. Here, there is a reference back to the cultural conservatism of Arnold's 'sweetness and light' and the reform's ambition to introduce everyone to 'the best that has been thought and *written*' (not *said*) (DfE 2013d, 3).

But the 'Inspired World' alone does not account for the belief that examinations can secure these ideals. Here, the 'Industrial World' view refers to how 'canonical judgement' goes through the 'reality test' (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006, 203). The industrial world encompasses 'the efficiency of beings, their performance, their productivity, and their capacity to ensure normal operations and to respond usefully to needs' (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006, 204). The 'industrial' process defines the quality of beings based on their ability to 'express their capacity to integrate themselves into the machinery, the cogwheels of an organisation': thus, demonstrating *predictability* and *reliability* (205). Take Gove's justification of exams as both being *meritocratic* and *efficient*. Firstly, he evokes a 'Weberian-like' legal-rational authority argument, by pointing out how moving to examination systems in civil service during the 19th century brought about a promotion system built on 'ability' through 'an objective measurement of merit' and schools carry this same levelling system (Gove 2012e). It is at this point that he ties this back to the role of cognitive psychology, which provides clarity

to why exams link well with the knowledge-based curriculum. Thus, examinations provide us with the motivation and self-belief to 'clear challenges'—in the words of Willingham, exam success provides the 'pleasurable rush that comes from successful thought' (Daniel Willingham cited in Gove 2012e). Moreover, the nature of exams means that they ensure that there is a 'solid understanding of foundations before learning starts' and that they can never be 'divorced from mastery of a body of knowledge—because after all, subjects are nothing if they are not 'coherent traditional bodies of knowledge' (Gove 2012e). Tying together the foundation of learning with assessment inextricably connects curriculum and examination. As Boltanski and Thévenot note, the harmony of any industrial order is 'expressed in the organisation of a system, a structure in which each being has its function, in short, a "technically predictable universe' (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006, 210).

On advice from the DfE and Ofqual, English has become a series of untiered linear exams at the end of the course in May/June (Ofqual 2017, 11). Controlled assessment, which is a structured assessed project that takes place during normal classroom timetabling but is usually moderated by an external examining body, has been removed so children can 'develop their understanding of the subject over a period of time' (Ofqual 2013a). The oral assessment remains but is taught as a separate qualification and does not count towards the GCSE English language qualification. Despite attempts by Gove to try and streamline all assessment to one exam board (DfES 2012, 3) something taken up again by Nick Gibb in 2015 (Weale 2015), OCR, AQA, WJEC and Edexcel have been accredited to provide final examinations in GCSE English for the summer of 2017. A broader change includes fixing grade boundaries, referred to as 'norm-referenced' testing, or more accurately, 'cohort-referenced' testing in this case because fixed grade boundaries can go up and down based on each year's cohort (Jadhav 2017). There have been substantial changes to replace the A-G grading system with a 1-9

scale, which encourages a system that can be referred to from KS3 to KS4, and it also acts as an aid for distinguishing higher achieving pupils (DfE 2013d; DfE 2013c).

It is here that the neoliberal rationality pursued by Gove and the Conservative programme becomes significant. I have already referred to the role that outcomes, (manifested through intelligent accountability), have played as a key preoccupation of successive New Labour, coalition and Conservative governments. Gove refers to research into the 'world-leading education systems' that provide autonomy for teachers and then combine this freedom with 'sharper, more intelligent accountability' (2011b; 2014a). It is the neoliberal tradition which ties "intelligent accountability", and the efficiency of the Industrial World view to that of the 'Market World' view. The Market worldview is not economic relations, but it instead emphasises the principles of *desires of individuals, interest, competition* and where unworthiness (of people, or perhaps even a nation itself) is expressed when one *fails, stagnates*, or *loses out* (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006, 197). Is this not what Nick Gibb means when he says knowledge is needed for our 'enterprising and entrepreneurial population' (Gibb 2016a), or when Gove finds in knowledge the competitive element for ensuring British students 'beat the world' (Gove 2012e)? Other aspirations for globalism might manifest themselves in a call for Heldian cosmopolitanism (or the gradual solidification of European identity!), for instance. However, for Gove, globalisation —'that moderately ugly word'—stands for the competitive neoliberal World Order—an Order that we have now fallen behind in if PISA testing is to be believed.

As Jones (2013) has stated, Gove justifies his reforms on two competing poles, but this inevitably leads to contradictions, even if the fusion of the two traditions has produced a substantial reform agenda and with it several concrete changes to English as a subject. We can read the English reforms as an attempt to embed the idea of traditional culture

at the centre of the subject again, drawing from the cultural conservative argument. The justification for this is more complicated than merely appealing to the status quo. There are appeals to teaching *the best that has been thought and written* as a liberal pursuit— that is, through appealing to the sense of wonder and freedom of expression that it brings to every pupil. In addition to this, cultural capital is equated to knowledge, and this has allowed the Conservative ministers to bring onboard cognitive psychology and American academics such as Hirsch and Willingham, as a justification for providing effective, evidence-based teaching methods, which ultimately refers to randomised controlled tests.

What is interesting here for English and teaching more broadly is why politicians have taken up Hirsch and Willingham so enthusiastically. Why does Hirsch make sense at this particular time and place in British politics? Nick Gibb states that Hirsch provided the 'shared language' for the ubiquitous terms in currency today such as 'cultural literacy', 'national communication' and 'common reference points', (2015a, 17)[17]. Importantly, he also gave Conservative ministers a social justice case for the knowledge-based curriculum (Gibb 2015a, 14). Gove, like Hirsch before him, borrows from Antonio Gramsci's thinking that conservative education leads to progressive (revolution-lite) ends because it allows the working classes 'to command its rhetoric' (Gove 2013a). This 'rhetoric', however, seems to be bent towards arming students to be thoroughly equipped for competing in the domestic and international world market, and the deeply entrenched class and public school system that still exists in Britain. English plays a key role in this given that along with history, it provides some scope for text selection. Such

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[17] Gibb reports that civil servants were all given bound copies of Hirsch's Core Knowledge Curriculum following the 2010 election to provide 'us with a tangible precedent for our thinking' and so to 'reassure' the civil servants that 'we were not entirely alone in our ideas' (Gibb 2015a, 13–14).

an ambition marks out the attempt to level access to knowledge (as cultural capital) for all social classes.

This approach has profound ramifications for more than just subject English. There is something deeper here in the desire to remove theory out of teaching practice and not just the lesbianism out of French poetry. It goes beyond a motive to reclaim the noble pursuit of spreading knowledge to open minds, which was so 'self-evident' to 'predecessors in Cabinet Office before structuralism, relativism and post-modernism' (Gove 2011c). It is also an attempt to recalibrate teaching practice into a mould that conservatives can accept, now that comprehensive system has been embedded and student-centred teaching has become the norm in teaching practice. The Hirsch method is light on teaching theory[18] and thus it can be framed as an empirical-heavy endeavour that should always ground itself in "what works" rather than something theory-led: first clearing the clutter; next, being able to pick out a vignette; then, memorising 100 pieces of classical music, or poems and novels. Each iteration becomes cleaner, more tangible, more quantifiable as it moves from education secretary expressing an opinion, White Paper, to current concrete school policy. This makes sense in a world of concrete practices shaped towards intelligent accountability and a notion of professional that is equated with managed outputs.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has situated this thesis within a policy analysis tradition that has developed over the past couple of decades. Rather than focusing on class, these policy sociology studies have tried to combine basic sociological questions with a flexible methodology that can track

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[18] Daniel Willingham's work sometimes fills this gap in the way ministers refer to teaching knowledge being done as story-telling (Gibb 2016c) but there is no theory of teaching practice as such. In fact, Willingham is quick to say that teachers should use the art of their craft to take on his insights into the classroom (Willingham 2012).

policy as it plays out within its different dimensions or "moments". Emerging themes such as the intensification of data systems at a "global" and "local" education level are viewed as part of the changing overall processes of modern schooling, as are the concerns about the growing role businesses play in the state sector.

It is possible to make the case that the Conservative reforms have intensified aspects of New Labour's programme about accountability and school management structures, whilst co-opting the issues around social justice (as "fairness"), within a conservative frame. To do so, the governments since 2010 have drawn together a number of ideas about teaching and schooling, with an emphasis on more autonomy for school leaders and classroom teachers, removing bureaucracy and promoting a new knowledge-driven curriculum. The extent to which this has been realised in practice is a core part of gaining a better understanding of how these reforms have been enacted on the ground.

These trends, however, must be understood within the context of the global financial crisis in 2008, and the subsequent austerity that brought with it a series of challenges right across the education sector. Despite supposedly being 'ring-fenced' school spending is estimated to have fallen by 8% since 2010 (Coughlan 2018). This funding reduction has resulted in an ever-increasing battle to win pupils, where league tables and the drive of parental choice have continued to dominate the agenda. Even in Scotland, which in 'marked contrast' to England, managed to avoid a lot of the third way policies posed under New Labour and kept funding and provision for teacher training high, currently faces pressures in maintaining the capacity of teacher training (Menter and Hulme 2012, 155). A budget cut of £6 million in the 2010 parliament led to challenges for 'teacher education providers' with some schools of education losing 30% of their academic staff' and prompted a renewed drive for the profession to increase 'efficiency, value for money and accountability' (157). The funding gap has continued to be a

problem for schools, notably in England, now that funding has been cut in real terms by 8% (Sibiesta 2018).

Drawing together each of these literatures, and taking account of the contemporary policy context, has allowed me to develop a critical reading of the 2013 reforms to GCSE English literature and language. Doing so has situated my research questions between the frames of schooling policy and English literatures. Ultimately, English reform sits within a programme that has combined neoliberal and cultural conservative tenets. In many ways though, it can be said to be more concerned with co-opting ideas about curriculum and professional practices that have developed as a result of the past few decades of academic and profession-led ideas about the subject. The rhetoric by Conservative ministers sought to reframe the content and pedagogy of English in a counter-revolutionary way to remove traces of models of English that have developed since the Post-War period, especially any multicultural or 'critical' influences (Jones 2013; Yandell 2017). It does this by drawing on a vocabulary of concepts such as knowledge-based teaching and cultural literacy—and by fostering ideas about English that draws from "many worlds". The result is a (re)ordering of the imagination at the institutional level about what it means to be an English teacher in the 21st century. The underpinning logics that organise these ideas are developed much more substantially in *Chapter Three*.

The following chapter sets out the multitude of policy theory, methodological choices and methods that I have utilised to develop my trajectory study of the 2013 English GCSE reforms.

Chapter Two

Towards a Policy Trajectory for English Reform: Policy theory, methodology, methods

> *The necessity of reform mustn't be allowed to become a form of blackmail serving to limit, reduce or halt the exercise of criticism. Under no circumstances should one pay attention to those who tell you: "Don't criticise, since you're not capable of carrying out a reform". That's ministerial cabinet talk. Critique doesn't have to be the premise of a deduction which concludes: this then is what needs to be done. It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what it is.*

(Foucault 1996, 284)

The last chapter aimed to provide a literature review that offered the reader a guide to navigating the broad contemporary policy context. In this chapter, I set out my discussion of the theoretical and methodological assumptions that were mobilised to form my policy trajectory study. A question can be asked to begin with: what role(s) might education policy analysis (and the analyst) play in response to a government reform? To answer this and to situate the study, a comprehensive answer will need to provide the purpose of the research and also set out the political ontology regarding choices that are made regarding approaches to theory, methodology, design and the tools of analysis.

Sketching out his view on the direction of education research and its discontents in 1997, Stephen Ball notes a cruel dissonance that critical researchers must face when they establish careers based on 'an antagonism towards the uncertainties and tragedy of reform' and thus 'trade in the artefacts of misery and broken dreams of practitioners' (Ball 1997, 258). Skip forward two decades and Michael Gove is even less flattering about academics working in this area of educational research: they are the 'enemies of promise' who peddle a 'bigoted backward

bankrupt ideology of a left-wing establishment' (Gove 2012a). This follows a similar path of comments made by former education secretaries, from Keith Joseph's proclamation to researchers: 'I'll start funding your research when you start telling me things I want to hear' (Joseph quoted in Pearson 2016, 128), to David Blunkett's insistence that social scientists had a choice to make between 'influence or irrelevance' (Blunkett 2000). Foucault sometimes spoke about his fascination with the space provided by living 'protected in a scholarly environment' (1997, 125). We are not in 1970s France, however, and much empirical research itself shaped by an instrumental impact agenda. The educational research funding context is itself increasingly driven by 'utility, evidence and measurable outcomes' (J. Wright 2008, 13). Despite having its limitations, the graduate thesis might remain one of the last domains of academic research for completing in-depth, ethnographic work (Pierides 2010, 191). It is useful to remind oneself, then, that social science can mean more than *goal building* by the use of instrumental rationality, conducting randomised controlled tests, or an exercise of "problem-solving".

Bent Flyvjerg fleshes out the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* in his *Making Social Science Matter.* Phronetic research[19] is an approach to social science that is concerned with the analysis of values and not the production of things that are 'encapsulated by universal rules, on specific cases' (2001, 57). Research that adopts a phronetic approach relies on 'theory of judgement and experience' (58). It points towards close-up accounts of real-life events, studying cases and context, bringing together agency and structure by asking *how* something

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[19] Flyvberg refers to two further 'virtues' of political science. 1) Episteme – a reference to scientific knowledge based on general analytical rationality. 2) Techne – 'craft', a pragmatic, context-dependent form orientated towards production of a conscious goal by the use of instrumental rationality (57). Foucault's work on analysing systems of techne such as prisons for instance, should be considered phronesis because it is less interested in building further social systems but gains its greatest potential by questioning the values built into such systems, which have become part of common-sense thinking.

happens, not just why (134-136). It encapsulates *practical rationality* that questions where we are heading to, or where we might want to, according to a range of values. Following Foucault, the study of power is a central concept in developing social science as phronesis. This enquiry captures not just who has the power, but moreover, what governing rationalities are present when governing occurs. A researcher possessing practical wisdom (phronesis) must interact between the 'general and the concrete' with judgement and choice (57).

In the rest of the chapter, I will sketch out how a deliberative reading of the English reforms might emerge. My argument begins with policy enactment: (Braun, Ball, and Maguire 2011; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012) conceived here as an invaluable resource but one which ultimately benefits from further dialogue with other theoretical resources which can capture a broader range of other 'moments' during the policy process. As this chapter develops, I will move from the broader considerations of policy theory to a more detailed discussion of the ideational and ethnographic methodologies informing my reading of the English reforms. In turn, I deal with questions of research ethics, data collection, analysis and method.

2.1 Theorising Policy Enactment

Like much research influenced by the 'interpretive turn', enactment research is concerned with the limitations of normative policy analysis[20]. Normative policy analysis seeks to change both behaviour and values at state or institutional level by shifting scarce resources (Blackmore and Lauder 2005, 97). Moreover, these kinds of studies are generally evaluated by deploying rationalist-empirical rather than discursive-interpretivist methodologies (Robert and Zeckhauser 2011, 19). In the educational setting, Ball et al. (2012) characterise normative

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[20] Ball et. al point to recent examples of studies (see Spillane 2006; Supovitz and Weinbaum 2008) that focus on implementation and 'set within a linear, top-down and undifferentiated conception of policy work in schools (2012, 4).

policy as too rational, something which ontologically characterises teachers as linear, asocial 'cardboard cut-outs', and schools and pupils as ideal policy subjects: adequately resourced, rational, and fully focused (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 5). Moreover, much of the literature on policy analysis dematerialises school context(s), which means that policy-makers and politicians regularly assume the 'best possible environments for implementation' (41). When policy is conceived as the 'closed preserve of the formal government apparatus of policy making' (Ozga 2009, 2), it writes out teachers and pupils who are often part of the 'jumbled, messy, contested creative and mundane social interactions' which make up part of its process (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 2). In response, Ball, Maguire and Braun discuss the importance of making policy into a process. Conceiving of *policy-as-process* attempts to document the different moments eclipsed by more rationalist accounts. It characterises policy production through its negotiation, interpretation and recontextualisation by school leaders and classroom teachers, where policy is enacted in creative ways and materialised in various artefacts, but often narrowed by the possibilities of discourse (3).

Ball, Maguire and Braun's two-and-a-half-year project develops a case-study approach to four secondary schools, where 'reflexive ethnography' and 'theory-testing' are mobilised to explore a dataset of 95 interviews with a range of school policy actors (2012, 17). They also draw from observations of events such as INSET days and contextualise data such as school demographics and budgets (17). The interpretation of data, which ultimately feeds into the theory-construction of the work, is varied. It draws heavily on Michel Foucault (including his archaeological conceptions of the discursive/non-discursive (2002), and governmentality (1995; 1998)). There is a little bit of actor-network theory, as well as some of Fairclough's "critical discourse theory". Furthermore, they use Barthes' distinction between the 'readerly' and

the 'writerly' texts to point out how some policies 'allow for limited possibilities for interpretation'—(making them readerly), whereas others allow for active reworking and are thus considered 'writerly' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 15). Ball's (1997) earlier work is cited, which outlines his dissatisfaction with the direction of educational policy work two decades previously: too much focus on single-issue policies (Ball 1997, 265), not enough academics resisting theoretical closure (essentially a dig at the structuralist Marxists), not enough research reflexivity (269), and policy subjects removed from the picture (271). Enactment theory, then, might be best read as the latest iteration of one direction taken by researchers well-versed in Foucauldian studies, as a result of ongoing debates about how best to analyse and conceptualise school policy.

Policy enactment, which includes both policy work and the policy process weaves together three constituent facets: *the material*, *the interpretive* and *the discursive* (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 15). Material conditions of policy work include the various institutional contexts that policy is built into and on (21). Material contexts, such as budgets, staffing and even the building itself can affect the shape given to policy, as will a school's external context, such as pressure exerted by its league table position or its Ofsted rating (21).

The interpretive—or the "hermeneutics of policy"—refers to the creative process of actively decoding or making sense of policy with reference to a school's position (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 43). A distinction might be made between *interpretation* work which tends to engage with the language of policy, and *translation* which holds a position between policy and practice through its process of putting 'texts into action' via the tactics of talk, morning briefings, 'learning walks', and through creating policy artefacts (45). Teachers are 'agents' in this process of enacting policy, but much of the meaning remains situated in their material contexts, such as a school's ethos or the availability of

resources. Teachers are also mediated by wider discursive factors, which 'constitute the contours of professional practice and subjectivity' (Ball et al. 2011, 622).

The discursive, borrowing from Foucault (2002), refers to how policies act as 'discursive strategies' by the way their texts, events, artefacts and practices "speak to the wider social processes of schooling, such as the production of 'the student', the 'purpose of schooling' and the 'construction of the teacher'" (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 16). Policy enactment puts teachers and pupils at its centre; it makes them 'productive subjects' through their subjection to the 'polymorphous techniques and apparatus of policy and the logics of 'improvement'" (16).

After some cautionary words about the 'seductive neatness' of providing typologies, Ball et al. (2012) outline eight policy actors that capture the 'sorts of roles, actions and engagements' that are part of interpretation and translation work in schools (49). There are *narrators*: usually leadership members who outline the 'vision', or the 'institutional narrative', and often 'the improvement plot' so ubiquitous and expected in the twenty-first century performativity culture (51). Narrators are closely connected to the role of policy *entrepreneurs*, who are defined as 'charismatic people', and 'forceful agents of change' that 'seek to recruit others to the cause' (53). These people often bring outside experience or deep learning and attempt to translate their ideas through school structures by employing various roles, tactics and techniques (54). Some actors are external to schools too. *Outsiders* refer to the increasing role played by consultants and edu-business people in bringing in new ideas or the (ever-diminishing) role of LEA that coordinate with schools over school improvement plans or child-welfare issues. Policy *transactors* refer to those school leaders that find themselves increasingly writing or working on data for accountability purposes in a low-trust system. They might also be specialists working

on enacting behaviour or pastoral policies, or more traditionally refer to the office staff transacting bureaucratic budgetary and administrative responsibilities (57). Policy *enthusiasts* are 'policy paragons' who 'embody policy in their practice' and 'grow themselves through creative productive work' (59). Moreover, they often act as *translators* too by organising 'events, processes and institutional texts of policy for others' (59). Against enthusiasm, is criticism, or the policy *critic*—best represented by the union reps or activists. Ball, Maguire and Braun characterise their relationship to policy work as usually 'marginalised and muted', and only becoming significant in the policy process at particular moments when policy translations seem to threaten the interests of their members (61). Finally, they refer to *receivers*, often newly qualified teachers, and teaching assistants, who often "exhibit 'policy dependency' and high levels of compliance" because of the nature of their roles and lack of experience (63).

Enactment theory places much emphasis on the role of policy artefacts in the enactment process. The study of the artefactual Ball et al. maintain is omitted from most accounts of previous policy research (2012, 136). This omission is all the more problematic given that significant school policies such as behaviour and uniform policies are:

> *embedded in a range of visual artefacts and practices that work to maintain the normalisation of the student, the teacher and the school – discourses that produce material affects and are interwoven into the processes of policy enactments and, ultimately, governmentality.*

> (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 136)

Ball, Maguire and Braun thus talk about the way teachers and students who embody the school, within a 'complex web of policy discourses' are incited "to 'do' the good school and 'be' the good teacher and 'perform' the good student" (2012, 135). Discourses refine and demarcate the discursive options available to teachers and pupils to 'do' or 'perform' their roles. In a Foucauldian vein, these are not discourses imposed

from the outside but rather they mobilised to allow teachers and pupils 'to work on themselves, produce themselves in particular ways' through their day-to-day actions or through creating posters, displays or internal policy documents (136). The artefactual, in making 'sets of ideas' about policies, captures the 'taken-for-grantedness' and the policy direction by encapsulating the 'ways of being and becoming' inside an institution (121), where the school can be considered as a complete disciplinary apparatus, assuming responsibility for a 'man as a whole', by taking charge of his 'physical and moral faculties' (Foucault 1995, 125).

As this chapter will outline in more depth, the insights of enactment theory play a central part in informing the research design of this thesis. This chapter now puts enactment theory into dialogue with several other theoretical resources which are not deployed by Ball et al. (2012) in their initial project. I believe they help to ask productive questions and stretch the contours of the theory understood as a set of 'unfinished abutments and lines of dots', (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012; Foucault 1996, 275). I believe such an engagement can provide a more suitable set of tools for developing a substantive 'trajectory analysis' of the curricular and assessment reforms to school English. Together they form a vibrant theoretical nexus for allowing one to think critically about the goals of the reform at the state level and implications for English as a subject, schooling and teaching professionals.

Other Important Theoretical Contributions

This thesis draws on a number of other critical theoretical resources to help it develop a reading of the English reforms. Ball et al. are clear that their book did not necessarily exhaust all other forms of interpretive resources (2012, 12). This section outlines three further areas that can provide enactment theory with productive dialogue. This analytic work raises some important follow-up points. The first relates to the dynamics about how we read the processes of policy: that is, whether there are different ways of conceiving policy, its interpretation and

enactment in its institutional context. What objects matter? Where do we find agency? The second asks how problematisation (derived from phronesis) can add to the critical function of enactment theory in providing a reading of the reforms.

a) Problematisation. There have been numerous previous attempts at conducting problematisation in the fields of sexuality (Foucault 1998), welfare policy (Bacchi 2009; Dean 2010) and in education itself (Scheurich 1997; Gale 2001; Ball 2013a; Webb 2014). These studies share an objective that is resistant to *solving* problems or finding 'correct' answers to policy problems. Rather, problematisation studies examine how objects come to be constructed, 'questioned, analysed, classified and regulated at specific times and under specific circumstances' (Deacon cited in Bacchi 2012a, 1). Foucault refers to problematisation as the "matter of analyzing, not behaviours and ideas, nor societies and their 'ideologies', but the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought—and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed" (Foucault 1992, 11).

Arguably, Ball et al. are in large part, constructing a problematisation of normative policy analyses by showing their inadequacies for explaining the way policy is done. At several points in their book, they refer to the way policy tries to 'define' problems, such as that of learning, for instance (2012, 95). As they suggest, policy rarely tells you what to do; rather, many policies goals simultaneously interact with contextual features in that they 'frame, constrain and enable the possibilities of teaching and learning' (7). Making problematisation more explicitly embedded in the actual process of reading the English reforms, however, would allow for a deeper discussion of policy enactment's role in developing a policy analysis as phronesis. Such a task would actively seek to disrupt or interfere with the *naturalness* of discourses making up teacher and pupil subjectivities in current schooling discourses.

b) Interpretivism, logics and affect. The 'interpretivist turn' in political studies has had a fruitful 15 years or so. A range of theoretical perspectives has become part of the landscape of political and social analysis. A great many of these start with a perceived dissatisfaction towards explanatory tools provided by rational choice theories of social science. Many academics have drawn from Michel Foucault and the tenets of post-structuralism in their policy analysis work. Amongst others, we have the 'argumentative turn' (Fischer and Forester 1993), the emergence of ideas around narrative and tradition (Bevir and Rhodes, 2003); governance (Bevir and Rhodes 2006); and the 'rhetorical turn' (Finlayson and Martin 2008).

From the outline of enactment work provided earlier, it is possible to see a number of conceptual cross-overs between the disciplines of policy theory in the political science and education policy research. We have had the move from government to governance (Bevir and Rhodes 2006) and policy-as-practice (Colebatch 2009, 145–147), where people do things and 'generate artefacts' which thus 'structure practices' and 'hold things together' (Freeman, Griggs, and Boaz 2011, 129). Freeman talks about policy translation being a creative, political process and not merely a technical action (2009, 435). Mark Goodwin remarks that although political scientists have paid 'surprisingly little attention' to education policy over the past twenty years' in general, and school policy in particular, educational researchers have paid plenty of attention to politics (2015, 534). This thesis recognises that the development of conceptual resources in both fields, which have moved down similar interpretive lines, open up useful and productive directions for testing some of the theoretical and conceptual tenets of enactment research. In so doing, I want to allow a more porous relationship between the two literatures. Current school policy is as a fertile field for informing broader political analyses, as health or public administration currently is.

One development, in particular, will prove useful for this thesis in reading my data: *the logics of critical explanation*. The logics approach offers 'middle-range categories' for connecting founding insights from Ernesto Laclau's and Chantel Mouffe's social ontology (2014) with empirical work in case-studies (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 165). The logics approach[21] has partly arisen out of a need to deal with two deficits that are often cited against discourse theory and poststructuralist work more generally. The first is a methodological deficit which points to neglect in thinking about questions of methodology and research strategy (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 6). The second issue is the perceived normative deficit in poststructuralism. By combining 'three distinct interpretive registers', which include *social, political* and *fantasmatic* (Glynos et al., 2015, 395), the logics approach attempts to overcome these by developing a language to both characterise and criticise governing practices (395).

The logics approach (Glynos and Howarth 2007) seems a particularly promising resource because it attempts to build on insights provided by other 'interpretivist' approaches such as Bevir and Rhodes' narrative accounts of the interpretation of actors. In my ideational analysis of the reforms, logics offers up some useful ways to characterise the 'regime' of the Conservative reforms more generally, to pinpoint changes to school English in a broader context. Importantly, it is underpinned by a commitment to problematise phenomena with research that privileges the context-rich case-study method (2002). In analysing my field data, it stretches policy enactment in thinking about the role of ideas and psychosocial responses to policy. It also draws a link between theorists who have worked with political theory resources in education (A. Wright 2012; M. Clarke 2012) and using the logics approach (Clarke 2012).

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[21] A more thorough discussion of the logics approach appears in *Chapter Three*, where a description of the different logics is provided.

The logics approach (Glynos and Howarth 2007) draws on three registers that are described in detail in the next chapter. The *fantasmatic* register, for instance, asks why subjects are 'gripped' by particular practices. This provides several directions for thinking about the role ideology might play in forming compliance or resistance in policy subjects within performativity structures. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the role of *affect* on why certain tenets of the reform are given more direction and energy than others (147).

c) **The 'material turn'?** Whereas much of British political studies has shifted towards ideas and language in policy, enactment research (despite sharing a similar theoretical lineage) marks a stage for also thinking about the materiality of policy, where 'the enactment of materially and discursively heterogeneous relations' can 'produce and reshuffle all kinds of actors', including: 'objects', 'subjects', 'human-beings', 'machines' and 'ideas' (Law 2009, 141). Foucault has proved a valuable interpretive resource but there is a strong move to draw the concept of discourse towards 'conjunction with material culture' (Bailey 2013, 810). Foucault's concept of *dispositif,* for instance, refers to the 'fluid, productive and mobile relations of power, in partnership with knowledge, intersect, permeate, modify, and produce subjectivities in concert with material objects and practices' (810).

Enactment research points to the materiality of policy in its discussion of contexts. Policies are said to 'literally move through different spaces' (Ball et al 2012, 41). Policies enter buildings and affect budgets. With their actors, they enter the foyer, move along corridors, climb up staircases and enter the classroom. Stephen Heimans attempts to push the reference to the material in enactment theory further. The "material turn" changes from an analysis of words and their explanatory potential, to how 'the entanglements of words and matter – and how bodies (of all kinds) materialise and have an effect (Heimans 2015, 160). Inspired by actor-network theory (ANT), he posits that enactment theory can move

away from 'the externalities of policy constraints' (before policy) and 'the products' (after policy) (Heimans 2012, 314). Instead, policy enactment might usefully explore 'what policy is' and thus 'how education (through policy) is materialised' (314). ANT thus 'takes instruments, methodologies and concepts to be agentic in the production of phenomena' (Gorur 2015, 92). Whereas enactment theory in Ball et al. reveals the 'untidiness' of policy, ANT 'reinserts messy bodies (human and otherwise)' into policy problematics by reformulating research questions about what comes to matter, both in the sense of meaningfulness and what actually materialises (Heimans 2015, 166). Heimans wants to find a way to research the 'emergent materiality of policy', where none of the human, the material, and the discursive are privileged as being 'primary causal agents' in the policy process (315).

Policy Interventions

I take on board Stephen Heiman's (2012) discussion of the future direction of enactment theory in the light of Ball et al. 's 2012 book. He refers to the 'prophylactic methodological analytics' of critical discourse analysis, which justly protects both the reality of research objects and researchers but also elides with some of the 'ontological possibilities' that might arise by slowing down and focussing on the working *with*, rather than *on*, research objects (313). Here, he is partly referring to ideas in Carol Bacchi's commentary on Annemarie Mol and what she refers to as 'ontological politics', where reality is conceived as 'multiple' and done *within* mundane practices, rather than preceding it (Bacchi 2012b, 142). Here, methods are not 'a way of opening a window on the world, but a way of interfering with it' (Mol quoted in Bacchi 2012b, 143). Methodological conservativism will do nothing to deal with the ongoing domination of 'evidence-based' research, where even qualitative methods have been ossified into the instrumentalist versions they were meant to disrupt (Webb and Gulson 2015, 168).

This thesis borrows widely in order to develop a picture of the reforms. In so doing it recognises that a 'reading' of the 2013 reforms should benefit from trying to deepen the understanding that representation and the material play in the processes of policy enactment. Generally-speaking, it is the interpretive component of policy that I am most trying to understand in this policy trajectory by seeking whether policy actors find space to interpret and practice English. In this sense, I feel there is much to learn from the ideas, actions and feelings of politicians and policy subjects, and I am reluctant to remove this from the centre of my analysis. However, I do recognise the benefit of being sensitive to 'the material' during the process of data analysis, especially in paying attention to context and the way policy connects to material objects (sometimes without human agency).

Moreover, taking on board the ontological assumptions of a 'material turn' adds the potential for a new level of criticality and impulse for the problematising process because it sees the researcher as part of the larger assemblage of things included in the research field. In the first instance, characterising social phenomena (interpretively) can form part of a strategy for judging and providing normative critique, given that it can postulate counter-logics to usher forth 'a space for hegemonic struggles' (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 197). However, the way events and actions are characterised becomes a form of resistance itself. As Bacchi says, any theoretical interventions 'have political effects' in that they 'make it possible to create other realities' (Bacchi 2012b, 151). This is because identifying contingent and malleable conditions of enactment can 'produce problems' that might be used to 'produce other thoughts and practice' (Webb 2014, 369). In so doing, a 'problematised' reading is set to point out multiplicities as they arise at the levels of 'thought, practice and enactment' rather than merely offering repetition (369).

2.2. Research Methodology, Study Design and Methods

The policy theory above has implications for the research design, methodology and methods that are addressed in the remaining sections of this chapter. The way I construct a policy trajectory of the English reforms is a result of wanting to find a productive (and available) way to capture the varying layers of negotiation happening throughout the different moments of the policy reform: at a state level through to the classroom. In the sections below I outline a series of research questions for the thesis, a discussion of the policy trajectory, the thesis as a case study, an outline of the study school's context, access and ethical considerations, and some more concrete decisions I made about data collection and analysis and the particular research methods that I applied. These are utilised as a part of the theoretical work that I have articulated in the previous sections. It does not make sense to separate the theoretical level with my methodological choices as if one were applying enactment theory unchallenged to a different data set. The real value of social science comes about when there is an advancement at a theoretical level, as well as at the level of concrete analysis, and this requires mobilising the tools of research in specific ways (Laclau 1991).

Problematising English Reform

This thesis attempts a 'problematised' reading of the English reforms to formulate several observations. Bacchi (2012b, 21) provides a series of questions to help the researcher think this through themselves:

1. What's the 'problem' (for example, of 'problem gamblers', 'drug use/abuse', 'gender inequality', 'domestic violence', 'global warming', 'sexual harassment', etc.) represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?

2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the 'problem'?

3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?

4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?

5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?

6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?

Constructing a problem means going more in-depth than a discussion of education secretaries' complaints that English reform is needed because not enough British literature is being taught, or grade inflation is rife, even though this can act as useful empirical data for thinking about how policy-makers construct certain problems to be solved. Instead, we might consider the issue of 'reform' in the first place. After all, this is the fifth such major change since the National Curriculum's inception in 1988 (Gibbons 2013b, 138). Over the past two decades, there has been a proliferation of policies mandated from the central government in order to 'control, manage and transform education' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 9). This increase is already significant in itself, in that the state sees the reform of education and its modernisation as an essential component for good governing. Stephen Gorard draws on statistical observations to make the point that many policies do not have much effect at least at the level of changing long-term historical patterns in education, especially when policy success is evaluated from a standard causal policy model. Instead, policy is sometimes an 'epiphenomena providing a legislated basis for what already exists' (Gorard 2006, 19). In which case, perhaps policy, conceived as policy-as-discourse organises education in different ways, by providing a form of momentum to certain ideas and thinking.

The research design of this thesis is constructed in a way to answer my three research questions. At this point it is worth restating these:

1) How are ideas of schooling, teaching, 'the teacher', and English as a subject, conceived of in the corpus making up the analysis of the 2013 reforms?

2) How do practitioners interpret and translate the reforms in their institutional setting?

3) Reflecting on the answers to questions one and two, what can be said about the "fate" of the English reforms?

The first research question is tackled through an analysis of the reforms through an analytical reading of the corpus of speeches and policy documents. This work provides the reader with a critical analysis of the conservative intellectual programme underpinning the reforms. Bacchi's problematisation method helps to formulate subsidiary questions such as how the components of schooling are constructed, organised and disseminated within core discourses. How are teachers conceived of and what rules are constructed to judge 'good' or 'bad' teaching?

To answer research question two, this thesis will utilise policy tools and concepts comprising of enactment theory. In so doing, this research develops an empirically-informed reading of the reforms as they are recontextualised within an institutional context, noting divergences or convergences as they play out. As the trajectory narrows to deal with one school's attempt to interpret and translate its goals, other practitioners and researchers may find parallels in their school or research, which become meaningful in comparison to their own experiences. I deal with this more thoroughly in a section in this chapter: 'a school in its context'.

Finally, research question three is answered by reflecting on the big picture view that a policy trajectory developed across multiple contexts (of influence and practice) can provide. English reform acts as a concrete

empirical example (or case) for extrapolating more comprehensive normative claims about how we should characterise the ideological assemblage of educational conservatism in the UK since 2010, and how they have had an impact on institutional changes. It also invites us to consider whether such a direction is desirable or whether there might be alternatives. This chimes with Bacchi's point that research should be willing to tackle "silences" and point to how problems might be "thought" about differently.

A Policy Trajectory: Reading policy from corpus to classroom

What do we mean by a trajectory study? Bowe and Ball (1992) characterise three policy contexts. The first refers to the *context of influence*, where policy is generally initiated and where 'interested parties struggle to influence the definition and social purposes of education' that leads to the text production (19). The *context of influence* is joined by and thus influenced by two further sites: the *context of policy text production* which refers to other policy actors outside of the government (such as working groups and Ofqual) and the *context of practice* which reminds us that policies have 'material constraints and possibilities' (21). As such, a trajectory study 'employs a cross-sectional' analysis to trace out how policy is 'formulated, negotiated and enacted' within the state and in the school (Ball 1993, 17). Through asking the 'how', 'what' and 'why' questions of policy, we become aware of the discourse that binds the 'policy ensemble together' in order to provide some coherence (Gale 1999, 405).

In the previous chapter, the notion of researching reform was taken to be a complex process which went beyond the preserve of central government (Ozga 2009), or what Bevir and Rhodes (2003) have described as the "Westminster model". Instead, researchers in political studies and educational theory have discussed the idea of policy networks, a range of think tanks, businesses or even 'embodied actors' (Ball 2016b). One policy trajectory of the English reform may seek to

find as many of the potential key actors involved with the development of 2013 reforms: special advisors, particular think tanks, Michael Gove, privileged nodal actors such as teacher-researchers, key people in Ofqual, and the examination boards. Ball outlines such a methodology:

> *Network ethnography (see Ball 2012) is a developing method of research (or an assemblage of research tactics and techniques) that engages with this new policy topography. It involves mapping, visiting, and questioning and as (Marcus 1995) puts it – following policy. That is, following people, 'things' stories, lives and conflicts, and 'money' (Junemann, Ball and Santori 2015).*
>
> (Ball 2016b, 550)

By following policy actors, the aim is to build up a picture about the way a network is formed of 'relationships, events and exchanges': where policy narratives are constructed. Such a method requires 'deep and extensive internet searches' that focus on 'actors, organisations and events', and draw from 'social media, blogs, podcasts, twitter and website documents' (553). This thesis is mindful of policy network ethnography as a research method that can usefully outline how ensembles of people and things emerge or become privileged, but it does not make mapping out a detailed network for the English reforms a central part of this research.

Ultimately, in providing a reading of the reforms 'as text' (Ball 1993) and strategy, this thesis looks to four key areas to provide rich data by drawing on some assumption of political rhetorical theory. The first is in the speeches, announcements, letters and other forms of publicly available correspondence made by education secretaries (Michael Gove, Nicky Morgan and Justin Greening) and the school minister (Nick Gibb). In this thesis, these are privileged actors in conveying the government message. Between them, they have produced over 200 substantive speeches since 2010 about schooling (gov.uk). There have been just under 1000 instances of communication more generally if one

includes media announcements, statements and government responses.

This study, therefore, accepts that an interpretation or characterisation of government, understood through an interplay of 'tradition, innovation, ideology, action performance, strategy and rationality, can be found through the study of political rhetoric (Finlayson and Martin 2008, 446). As Finlayson and Martin suggest, it is possible that a speech includes multiple authorship of undersecretaries, advisors, and thus in general 'ideological assemblages at work across a party or government', rather than solely the personal views of one individual (449). A corpus of speeches might be considered a *solidification* of work and ideas from many policy sources making up a network, providing an excellent resource to form a 'snapshot of ideology in action' (449).

Secondly, it draws from two White Papers since 2010 (DfE 2010a; DfE 2016). Thirdly, several key documents from Ofqual have been collated, including advice on the programmes of study, consultations. Finally, I considered the 'products' (the final curriculum) provided by the four exam boards that outlined some advice on teaching the texts. These latter sources provided relevant documents for looking at the way the reforms were being materialised into 'text' for curricular reform and English in particular, and things that might be used by practitioners of English teaching, needing to develop schemes or assessment and provided an important insight into developing an overview of the 'key messages' of the reforms. Overall, I have constructed a corpus of 58 speeches, white papers, Ofqual policy documents and curriculum material from four exam boards.

As the thesis develops into a discussion of the ethnographic fieldwork, and the policy trajectory deepens and narrows, I ask whether *Lime Tree Community School* seems to accede to many of the 'central messages', or 'statements' about English and English teaching made afar by

politicians and policy-makers. How do these statements play out in a schooling environment? Nick Turnbull describes a 'social problematology', where rhetorical statements are conceived as relational (questions of distance) and not just communicative acts, as they are attempts to govern over distance (Turnbull 2017). If Bevir and Rhodes (2003) are correct that narratives are *decentred,* then there is a possibility that these statements play out in the interpretive response of actors by becoming part of the language and texture of the institutional governance systems. It is worth considering the extent to which the state-driven conceptions of education, school English and teaching find their way into schools and via language and practices, or in the policy enthusiast's interpretative work. As Ball has described, a school leader once used the word 'focus' 38 times in a single interview to describe the orientation of her staff to the standards discourse (Ball 2013a, 168). As Peter Bansel adds, working with Ricoeur's idea of *narrative as a mimetic relation*, policy might become understood as 'a constitutive and regulatory technology of government', where narrative (as a technology of government) prefigures 'what is possible to think, say, be or do in any given time and space' (Bansel 2015, 185). To what extent, then, does the language of ministers reflect itself in the language of professionals given that they have different aims in their everyday work?

In some sense, this thesis resembles the participant approach set out by Jan Nespor in his study of one school in Virginia. In studying education, Nespor refers to the 'intersection in a social space, a knot in a web of practices that stretch into complex systems beginning and ending outside the school' (2013, xiii). Nespor draws on the school and classroom as one entry point and not as privileged sites in their own right. In my own thinking, it is not enough to analyse the effect of reforms by seeking answers in classroom observations alone. Instead, I want to find a theoretical vocabulary to connect external discourses with the "life" of classrooms. How did professional values gained from

life before being a teacher impact a teacher's pedagogy? How did the nature of the local community affect the type of school intake? And how did teachers attempt to understand this? How did material conditions impact on curriculum decisions? I wanted to be attentive to the different layers and flows that make up the policy cycle, capturing how they were interwoven in messy ways that made the practice of policy enactment a sometimes unpredictable venture.

Case Study

Robert K. Yin discusses the need to both *define* and *'bound'* a case study (Yin 2014, 31–34). Firstly, the act of "defining" refers to the process of working out the unit of analysis that is being used in the study. In this sense, my unit of analysis is broad in *Chapter Three* in that it tries to consider the "Gove reforms" as an intellectual programme. In Chapters *Four, Five* and *Six,* my focus is more specifically on the 2013 English reforms. Secondly, bounding refers to making decisions about the limits of the research in considering what is relevant for the study and what is not. It refers to the institutions involved, the period the research covers and the type of evidence collected (34). Here I can say that I focused on the 2013 English reforms[22] (as opposed to maths). I also tried to capture as much of the complete cycle of the reforms (2015-17), hence my reason for piloting the study early in May 2016. In designing my 'on the ground' research, and making an honest judgment about my time commitments, I opted to focus on one English department, in one school over a set period of 12 calendar months. I limited my data collection, therefore to the community of teachers I worked alongside, pupils I met, and the documents and visual data that I collected. Certainly, given that I focused a great deal on the context of this

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[22] The cumulative, sedimented nature of policy means that one is always likely to be seeing iterations of previous policy (Ball 2013b, 63).

institution, I attempted to put forward an 'in-depth' view of one particular school.

Considering some surface features such as rating and department attainment, I cautiously propose that *Lime Tree* is an 'ordinary' school. Ball, Maguire and Braun refer to opting for 'four ordinary schools' during their study, which shared surface resemblances, and were not 'subject to external interventions' because they might be failing, or granted 'more than normal autonomy' as outstanding schools, so as to avoid examples that would only provide 'extremes' of 'difference' and 'circumstances' (2012, 13). The idea of 'ordinariness', however, is problematic. In fact, given that schools must compete and *perform* against one another within a language of performance, no school would want to be considered 'ordinary'. Instead, each through their brochures and websites, market their bespoke properties as a way to 'locate' their school (Maguire, Perryman, et al. 2011, 9). Arguably, the extent that this performativity becomes reified in structural differences too is contentious, but it at least makes the task of identifying an ordinary school more difficult given that the way a school brands itself will have knock-on effects to the texture of teaching habits or the ethos that makes up different schools.

This research is set up as a single case, which links theory-testing with the analysis of empirical data. Yin refers to the *critical* case study to test theory whereby a 'clear set of circumstances within its [the theory's] propositions are believed to be true' (51). It does not make sense to think about enactment theory in quite these terms where the theory sets itself up as ready to be iteratively drawn from and used in new and unexpected ways. However, enactment research does advance a set of coherent concepts, such as policy subjects, the artefactual and the discursive and these can be engaged with to see how productively and persuasively they explain the enactment of the English reforms.

As part of this process of theory-building, my thesis attempts to provide a rich empirical data of one reform (the 2013 English reforms) and one school (*Lime Tree*), but in so doing, it offers an opportunity for considering my research questions about how (once problematised) English, teaching, teachers, and learners are constructed in the wider school setting. Moving between theory and data and back again to theory, this thesis makes broader claims about the way teaching are discussed within the public discourses of the state, and secondly, how these characterisations play out in an institutional setting by detecting discursive strategies, tactics and practitioner engagement.

Bent Flyvbjerg (2011) helps us to put this in even stronger terms than Yin, both in justifying the power of example in case studies and in bringing us back to the question of phronetic social science. The assumption that case-studies are best used for generating testable hypotheses is challenged (77). This assumption fails to appreciate that rich case-studies can provide scope for many different readers to 'draw diverse conclusions' about what the case is: a good case-study will be many different things to different people, allowing the reader to occupy their own interpretive space (86). If such a case narrative can provide a strong narrative along with concepts and theoretical formulas, then it can provide valuable insight for researchers and practitioners who want to know how policy interventions work inside a particular institution. This way of thinking about "cases" is something often absent in social science studies (Abbott quoted in Flyvbjerg 2001, 86). The tenets of dealing with evidence and case study from an abductive perspective are given a philosophical grounding in Brian Haig and Colin Evers' work (2015).

In developing insights through data analysis, the thesis draws on a tradition of abduction (Glynos and Howarth call this "retroduction" in their *logics of critical explanation*). Despite having some parameters to work from (a particular reform, a particular school and a particular

timeframe), my approach to data resembles researchers such as Mats Alvesson and Svend Brinkmann (see Alvesson & Karreman, 2011; Brinkman 2012, 2014, 2017). These theorists posit that it is better to work with flexible and varied constructions [of data] rather than trying to build solid ground' (Alvesson and Karreman, 2011, 38). Data is not just a 'passive medium which mirrors the reality 'out there' but can be used 'actively and creatively' for developing 'vocabularies' that allow the analyst to point to possible meanings (38). Rather than trying to develop a fully systematic coding approach to interviews and fieldnotes running a total of 120,000 words, this thesis appreciates instances of data 'that truly surprise us, and cause a breakdown in our understanding' (Brinkmann, 2014 724). This informs an understanding of case studies proposed by Bent Flyvbjerg. His insistence on the importance of narrative is confluent with Nick Peim's idea that 'narrative is always already in research, any research' and opens up 'powerful possibilities for the researchers'(Peim 2018, 63).

Into the Field: A school in its context

As established earlier, even an 'ordinary' school is difficult to define. Maguire et al. refer to how within a policy framework of performance tables and standards, schools are often seen 'embellishing their achievements and constructing themselves in very different ways' (Maguire, Perryman, et al. 2011, 8). Superficially at least, it is worth referring to how external authorities view *Lime Tree* as an introduction to summarising the study school. This description is not simply a precursor to *Chapter Four* which deals in-depth with the school's context and in so doing asks the more interesting question about how institutional context is part of the school's enactment processes.

According to their latest Ofsted report, *Lime Tree* is a 'much larger than average', mixed-sex, non-denominational, comprehensive institution and the vast majority of its pupils are White British (school Ofsted report, 2015). It is currently going through a prolonged and ongoing

conversion to become an academy within a multi-academy trust. At the time of my research, it had a 'requires improvement' Ofsted grading, but its results were improving (section 8 report, 2016). The school's 2016 attainment 8[23] results (at 49.4 points) were slightly above the county (49 points) and the national average (48.5 points). The English department itself had achieved good results, and this meant that the department was considered doing well by its school leadership members.

It is worth pointing out that as a suburban Norfolk School, *Lime Tree* is already conceived in specific ways by external authorities. Michael Wilshaw, encapsulated this in his 'the unlucky child' trope, where litter dominates the playground, there is 'disorder in the corridors', the 'walls are bare' and 'classrooms untidy' (2013, 5). The regional commissioner for academies, Tim Coulson, refers to a region that has 'far too much mediocre education'—not 'terrible' schools—but 'nothing like good enough in terms of what they're offering children' (Martin 2014). The extent to which this discourse played in forming the collective conscious of *Lime Tree* was something I tried to better understand through my conversations with those working there.

Access and Ethical Considerations

Access to the school was obtained through contact with the deputy head (gatekeeper). I had been employed as a learning support assistant two years previously at the school and had contacts, which made this part of the process relatively straightforward. The head of English duly agreed in writing that I would be able to spend time in the department as a participant-observer. The ethical guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (from its 2011 version to its (BERA 2018)) has been a useful guide for best practice.

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[23] *Attainment 8* measures a student's average grade across eight subjects in an attempt to encourage a broad and balanced curriculum.

Ethical clearing was obtained on two separate occasions from the ethics committee at the University of East Anglia, School of Education and Lifelong Learning. The first was related to the pilot stage of the study, which allowed for informal conversations with staff members, interviews and non-participant observation in the classroom. This pilot gave me some initial data to work on over the summer whilst I built up a better idea about how I wanted to approach the research at the start of the new academic year. My second ethics application broadened my research capacity. In particular, I asked for additional ethical clearance to photograph documents and policy artefacts, and to take on the role of a participant-observer in the classroom as a learning support assistant within the English department. I would also be able to sit in on training days and departmental meetings. The role was not paid and had no written contract provided by the school, although I discussed with the head of the department to establish any 'grey areas', such as how I would intervene with behaviour challenges[24].

Throughout the study, I provided full anonymity for staff members and pupils that gave consent to take part in the study. I undertook a process of anonymising names by giving each participant a pseudonym. I did not, however, adopt full 'blanket anonymisation' which might extend to removing other instances such as 'gender', 'age', 'ethnicity', and 'political belief' or levels of experience (Clark 2006, 5). Although this means that there is a higher chance that teachers *within* the school might recognise factors such as gender and level of teaching experience, I feel this provides essential background context about why individual teachers say certain things. Indeed, unlike many policy-makers who have a habit of conceiving of teachers as asocial beings, I consider these essential components for explaining attitudes and actions. The BERA guidelines note that 'the rights of individuals should be balanced

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[24] My role was limited to prompting pupils to carry on with their work if they became distracted. I did not give out sanctions.

against any potential social benefits of the research' (BERA 2018, 26). With this in mind, I worked with teachers to ensure that high standards were upheld. Teachers reviewed their transcripts, and there were instances when I was asked to remove particularly "honest" comments that they were uncomfortable. This was completed in response. In particular, I have sought to provide many of my quotes where there was some convergence of opinion on a topic or theme.

In all, opt-in consent forms were signed by ten teachers in the department and 27 pupils across the three classes in which I was a participant-observer. One class, the vocational group, which was made up of pupils studying two days a week at a technical college caused an initial problem because ethical consent was difficult to attain from their parents. After two previous attempts at sending the ethics form with a stamped, self-addressed envelope (one of which went with a school letter signed by the headteacher) there had only been one response from 12. Because of this, I asked for an opt-out arrangement from the chair of the ethics committee who agreed that this was appropriate. Again, a self-addressed, stamped envelope and letter was sent out to parents. I received no response. I then told pupils that they could remove themselves from the study at any time. This was repeated separately by the class teacher when I was not present. One pupil from the class did this during the initial stages of the research, and no research data were collected on them. Given that the class dynamic involved pupils that were not taking part in the study, I worked to make sure that I only documented "talk" and "action" of pupils that had given consent.

Data Collection and Analysis

Along with the government policy documents and speeches, data in the field were collected from four primary sources: fieldnotes, interviews, documentation (such as learning resources), and visual artefacts (such

as photographs of wall displays). These are discussed individually in the sections below.

Regarding concrete matters, my research was initially coded line by line using NVIVO. This prompted me to read closely and apply a tag. NVIVO provided central storage for the project and allowed me to use the 'search' function to search for particular words deployed with regularity. As noted in my case study section, the application of data to making broader observations was a little less systematic than comparatively inductive approaches to research and I focused on elements I found surprising and puzzling rather than in trying to build up a *complete picture*. In this sense, the movement from coding tags to in-process memos was more akin to the notion of "stumble data" that Svend Brinkmann discusses (2014). I was aware that drawing on the conversations and artefacts that I recorded or documented may not be simply given as data, but at certain points in rereading, 'they may cause us to stumble' and warrant closer attention for the fact they do not necessarily fit within a given theme (724). It was at this point that I would spend time working through the implications for informing my understanding of concepts such as "teaching" or "learning".

In first reading my fielnotes and interviews, I drew on an approach outlined by Simon Watts who offers a way of coding, that allow for a 'descriptive to the interpretive' (or a what/how) tagging to be undertaken (2014, 5). This coding process follows a simple two-step approach by which the researcher firstly engages with the data from the 'first-person', or from the participant's perspective by asking what the participant is saying, before providing a second, interpretive level of coding which asks how the participant is constructing the point they are talking about (6). Again, the aim here was not to build up a systematic thematic analysis but to ensure my fieldnotes and interview were being read closely, that I could identify promising ideas and so that I had tags in NVIVO to help me navigate my later analysis.

Thus, an English teacher asked to describe how they understood the role of English teaching in schools said this to me during an interview and I coded it as such:

English teacher English subject	*I've got fond memories of English as a subject when I was a student, and it struck me that the role of the English, this seems like a massive bias, that the role of the English teacher seems to be a pastoral role.*	As remembering experiences being a student As a pastoral role

As Simon Watts states, an interpretation of something 'always comes to be understood as something' and this constitutes the first act of interpretation for the qualitative researcher (2014, 6). In Heideggerian-fashion, "a case" (English teaching) is given its meaning through the participant's interpretation of their English teaching as manifested through the role of the 'as structure' (as a pastoral role) (Watts 2014). Not surprisingly, this teacher's response prompted more questions than it answered. I did use this tagging process to help me explore new areas. During my participant observations, I would go on to establish whether (and how) 'pastoral' discussions occurred during teaching class texts, (if they did at all, of course). What did a "pastoral role" look like? Did this reflect the language of policy or text? In retroductive fashion, I would then return to the data to see if this had changed anything. In turn, this process led to iteratively-built in-depth analytical memos that later formed the specific analyses that structure my three study chapters (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011, 126).

From here, identified "stumble data" were involved in the process of theory-testing and used to test the feasibility of both the logics of critical explanation (mostly *Chapter Three*) and enactment theory (in

Chapters *Four, Five* and *Six*). Whereas grounded theory[25] (Glaser and Strauss 2009; Charmaz 2006) develops theoretical insight from using empirical data, this thesis attempts to develop an analysis based on already-established theoretical resources but does so retroductively, using empirical data to develop further or alter critical ideas or concepts where their explanatory potential do not adequately explain things. As Ball has remarked 'in the analysis of complex issues—like policy—two theories are probably better than one' (1993, 10). But what does this mean for thinking about policy theory retroductively? For a start, rather than waiting until the end of the research project to apply theoretical literature, theory-construction 'assumes extensive familiarity' with a range of resources throughout the research process (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, 173).[26] Thus, sifting through 'unexpected findings', or focusing on the 'double fitting of theory', there is an attempt to rework a theoretical resource. By analysing data from several theoretical perspectives, some of it will fall into existing theories, whereas some of it will not. This puzzling may construct 'a new game with new rules' when trying to piece together the relationship of disparate themes within the data set (177).

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[25] Early on I took the choice to reject grounded-theory as a route for theory-construction, even though the cyclical heuristics of coding, theoretical sampling and revisiting the data via constant remained valuable. I rejected it on the basis that so much policy theory had pointed to the ubiquity of performativity and standards in the schooling system and many theoretical explanations had already devised good explanations for this. As such, what sort of theory was likely to emerge from my corpus using grounded-theory? In characterising the logic of schooling, we might find subtleties in the performativity structures that have not been talked about before, but ultimately, I felt it would be more productive to put into dialogue already-established theoretical concepts from enactment, logics and problematisation, which also provided me with a well-developed analytical strategy and political ontology. Such abductive work still leaves open 'surprises' and 'puzzles' (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, 169)

[26] This is time consuming in the compacted, modern day doctoral programme, but I had worked with components of enactment theory in my MA dissertation and I benefited immensely from attending the Essex Summer School in my first year of study (2016) to enhance my knowledge of Ernesto Laclau's works and *the logics or critical explanation* (Glynos and Howarth 2007).

(Non)Participant Observations

The bulk of my fieldwork content involved observations in *Lime Tree*. This fact meant oscillating my role between that of a participant observer and non-participant observer, depending on the activity[27]. My time in the field spanned four weeks in the 2016 summer term where I undertook a series of classroom observations and interviews, and the entire 2017 academic year, where I attended between one and two days a week as a participant-observer (60 days of fieldwork in total). During these fieldwork days, I attended 117 lessons, across three class sets, which included two year 11 classes and one year 10. These included a middle/lower set of year 10 pupils. I agreed with the department to work with a year 11 vocational group, which comprised of a small class of boys (12 pupils) who spent two days a week in college training in things such as engineering and mechanics, alongside a slimmed-down GCSE programme. Moreover, I participated in another year 11, middle set where many pupils were averaging a level 4 and 5 (roughly C grade equivalent), although the school expected many to achieve a 6 (B grade).

I also observed from a broadly non-participant position during departmental meetings about the new GCSE curriculum, data and resourcing. Sometimes, I provided a limited input on what children had been doing in the classes I was supporting in during meetings. Throughout fieldwork, I attended seven formal Monday departmental meetings and spent lunchbreaks and each afternoon (my 'free periods') in the staffroom, sometimes writing up my notes if things were quiet, or taking auspicious moments to speak with passing teachers. Furthermore, the school had set me up with a faculty email address which meant that I received all the briefing correspondence (both whole school and within the English department) across the working

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[27] Cresswell refers to this as the 'changing observational role' (2012, 238).

week, as well as shared resources which individual teachers had sent to the 'all department' address. Tracking this meant I kept up-to-date with changes whilst I was away from the field and allowed me to see what resources teachers were sharing.

I had previously worked at this school for 18 months a couple of years before undertaking my doctoral research, and this meant that I had supported some of the English teachers before when I was a learning support assistant. Any observer must find the right kind of distance between themselves and their study group, not only to bring about an empathetic attitude but also because they must find 'the preferential' instrument of observation (Baszanger and Dodier 2004, 14). For instance, previously knowing some of the staff made it easier to gain access to documents, and meant I was comfortable having conversations regarding my research early on. But for the sake of being able to step back to write, however, I felt it was essential to maintain my identity as a researcher and not as a part-time worker. As I explain in *Chapter Four*, I achieved this by spending more time observing and taking notes than actively engaging with pupils.

I was familiar also with a handful of the pupils, having worked with them when they were in year 7 and 8. Most remembered me and this meant that I quickly gained their trust. This did mean that I had to explain my new role as 'researcher' and not a learning support assistant. Many pupils prompted by me explaining research (and their role in it) asked further questions about my doctoral studies, whether I was going to be rich after I had finished, or how I was going to write a mammoth 100,000 words—questions I told them I regularly asked myself.

Fieldnotes are said 'to *mediate* between lived experience and ethnography' (Goodall 2000, 87). Thus my fieldnotes were a product of my interpretation of events and a form of translation. They cannot be considered direct nor final, but they are creative in a sense they offer a

characterisation of particular events that occur in empirical phenomena. Following Richard Freeman, translation carries over meaning from one context to another— a point he makes when quoting Susan Sontag: 'to translate is still to lead something across a gap, to make something go where it was not' (Sontag quoted in Freeman 2009, 433). Throughout my study, I recorded numerous interactions with teachers and pupils, initially with handwritten fieldnotes, which were later typed up usually on the same day. The typing up process was something that developed throughout the fieldwork. After a month, I started typing up my initial scratchings in a sequential manner to provide a more narrative form, and to provide an order to my fieldnotes by breaking up separate events into a, b, c, etc. In this way, I had also opted to break down the day into school periods pragmatically, and this arguably imposed a limiting structure to my field notes, given that I might have chosen to join up events throughout the day differently[28]. After all, most everyday occurrences 'do not happen like dramatic narratives', with neat causes and 'clear-cut consequences' (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011, 112).

Interviews

The second primary means of data collection was the use of interviewing. Throughout my fieldwork, 11 formal interviews were conducted. These lasted between approximately half-an-hour to one-hour. Six were carried out during the 'pilot stage' of my fieldwork whilst a further five were completed in July 2017 towards the end of the

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[28] For instance, during a cold snap both pupils and teachers were concerned about how their classes were so cold that pupils felt they could not work. This naturally led to conversations in the class where teachers negotiated uniform policy by allowing pupils to wear their jackets, and in the staff room later where a joint email was sent at lunchtime to the leadership team after teachers negotiated how to phrase the wording in order for it to have the most impact. Classroom teachers had gathered evidence with thermometers, checked out the legal limit for school buildings and found a problem in their argument when the temperature was just on the cusp of being legally acceptable, but still too cold to get their pupils to work. The initial organisation of my fieldnotes did not necessarily capture the way this played out and in-process memos became important for linking these events up.

fieldwork. All interviews were audiotaped, fully transcribed and sent to the research participant to confirm that they were happy with me using the data. If not, they had the opportunity to have it removed from the data set.

Crang and Cook state that interviewing cannot be treated as a separate method, as all 'research involves learning through conversation' (2007, 60). This points to the informal and formal nature of research through conversation. For instance, I undertook informal, unstructured conversations with my participants, and this acted as a bedrock for emerging ideas. These were conducted "on the move", where I would speak to teachers whilst walking between lessons, briefly in the staffroom, and almost without fail at the end of each lesson that I observed. These conversations could last between two and 15 minutes, depending on the teacher's availability. Tidying up the classroom at the end of a period provided me with valuable time to strike up conversations, or ask for clarification about an event that had caught my eye in the classroom. I would write notes up as quickly as possible, usually against the windowsill on the stairwell on my way back to the staff room.

Building on my initial coding and in-process memos, the final five interviews were more focused on answering questions I had formulated, rather than scoping out more information. The questions to these interviews emerged out of themes that had come from my pilot and early fieldwork observations. Despite this, it is worth remembering that interviews only offer the ethnographer 'another set of observations that must be assessed' (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011, 252). The interviewee is not a transmitter of knowledge, but someone actively and collaboratively constructing knowledge 'in association' with the interviewer (Holstein and Gubrium 2004, 141). In all, nine staff members were interviewed: the head of English, the second in faculty, six classroom teachers and one learning support assistant. I interviewed

the head of English twice and another classroom teacher who had also been involved with planning the new GCSE twice.

Documents

During fieldwork, I collected numerous documents. These included official policy documents such as those sent to the head of English by the exam board and the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), which regulates qualification, examinations and assessments in England. I also sought out documents that had been produced by teachers in the department who were trying to make sense of the new reforms, or ways to successfully enact its goals. These documents included material, such as work plans, revision schedules, drafts of work in progress, data analysis. In the classroom, I collected originals, or photographed learning resources, such as activity sheets, marking sheets, or the texts that teachers were using, and sometimes pupil's work.

As a sum, these documents provide me with an insight into the texture of school life, as well as how policy was being translated. Given that documents form bureaucratic artefacts of what is said and understood, it is arguably impossible to think about government without documents (Freeman and Maybin 2011, 155). Systematic documentary analysis might be problematic because many documents will be made to represent things in specific ways and therefore, it is advised instead, to treat them 'as social products', rather than as something to be taken at face value (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 168). This principle applies as much to a government White Paper as it does to a school presenting their Pupil Premium figures. The notion of documents as 'social product' can be pushed further, especially when it is theorised within the enactment literature. Understood within enactment theory, documents are the materialisation of both the interpretation and translation of official policy. Documents might tell us something about the language of reform, but they also offer insights into the disciplinary

structures of schooling too. The next section sketches this out in more detail.

Policy Artefacts/or the artefactual

During my research, I collected policy artefacts. In trying to understand how visuals made up part of the fabric and governmentality of the school, I collected and photographed 'good attendance' posters and behaviour prompts. This work allowed me to consider how whole school policies might feed into the changes occurring in the department as a result of the new English reforms. I was also interested in trying to capture offshoots about curriculum change in departmental email communication, documents, the staffroom and classrooms. These objects of interest included various assessment criteria, the development of teaching and learning resources, wall displays, unpolished drafts and iterations of documents that embodied departmental thinking.

There have been studies that actively ask participants to form photo-essays as responses to joint projects in workplace settings. Jenny Cameron and Katherine Gibson, for instance, mobilised participatory action research methods in a 'poststructuralist vein', to invite their research participants to document their responses to a local economic restructuring programme that was occurring in their area. This task was done through the participants using photo-essays to tell stories that many could relate to, such as the 'strong and persistent feelings of anger, bitterness and betrayal over the restructuring process' (322). This formed the backdrop for future workshops that allowed a 'process of group forming and collectively creating ideas about the future' (327). I did not adopt this type of interventionist or participatory approach in my thesis because I did not want to encourage the staff to create documents for particular ends. I was opportunistic, however, in asking them what organically created artefacts meant or how they intended to use them, either during interviews or informal conversations.

As Michael Emmison suggests, there is a need to go beyond understanding the photograph merely as a 'realm of representation' to something which captures 'social and cultural processes' and the 'material ecology of the built environment' (Emmison 2004, 248). Policy artefacts as theorised and discussed by Ball et al. (2012) certainly help deliver on Emmison's point that any visuals serve a purpose to the extent that '*we* can supply the theoretical or conceptual point they purport to deliver' (248). In an in-depth analysis, however, there should be room to enable us to also 'engage values and feelings (or sentiments), those very human expressive qualities that are part and parcel of policy problematics', without losing an analytical capability to connect this to patterns found in wider discursive formations (Yanow 2007, 117). Such a task of bringing artefacts into practice would serve to provide a level of human interaction that is underrepresented in Ball et al. 's initial project by trying to capture 'live' interactions with some of their policy artefacts in departmental meetings, the classroom and the staffroom. Albeit modestly, I attempt to capture some of this in my thesis, and notably in *Chapter Six*.

2.3 Conclusion

During this chapter, I have posited some of the mechanics for constructing a policy trajectory reading of the 2013 English reforms. In the process of doing this, I have argued that normative policy analysis does not have a sufficient grasp on the 'reality' of policy work. Instead, I have outlined a research strategy that involves engaging with several data sources appearing at the different stages of the policy cycle (such as the state and the school environment). Together, these allow me to ask three main research questions about the character and content of the "Gove reforms", and how the ambitions of the reform have played out with school English. As such, this thesis design is guided by my attempt to problematise the way the constitutive tenets of reform are contingently constructed in policy discourse.

Engaging my data from a range of theoretical resources, I seek to provide a case-study which speaks to multiple audiences: whether that be the 'narrow and deep' level of a particular school context, or at the level of the state. It provides an excellent opportunity to systematically explore how the content and objectives formed at the *context of influence* interacts with competing discourses present in institutional contexts. By the end of the policy trajectory process, I aim to have something substantive to say about the way reform converges with or diverges from, what is intended to be achieved. This study sets itself up as a deliberative piece of work which consequently asks whether the direction of policy is both desirable or inevitable. Research conducted in this vein feeds back into the very political and social processes it studies (Flyvbjerg 2001, 156).

In the next chapter, I put my trajectory study into practice by first developing a reading of the Gove reforms as they have been constituted in a variety of official documentation and speeches. These offer us an insight into how policy-makers and politicians involved with the Conservative reforms to education (in both the coalition and the following Conservative governments of 2015 and 2017) conceive of schooling, teachers and pupils.

Chapter Three

Problematising the 2013 Reforms to GCSE English

To adopt without revision the concepts prevailing in a polity is to accept terms of discourse loaded in favor of established practices

(Connolly quoted in Bacchi 2012a, 151).

In the previous chapter, I made the argument for a research design that combines multiple theoretical resources in order to analyse a broad range of data sources which between them can be said to capture the different processes of the policy cycle. These include the *context of influence* that leads to the negotiation over policy meaning at a party-political level, the *context of production* (including outside bodies such as exam boards and Ofqual) and the *context of practice* (teachers, school level). Enactment theory arguably pushes the explanatory *context of practice* further given that it now furnishes us with several valuable tools and concepts to think about how 'policy' is profoundly shaped once it enters to the institutional context of a school. It was posited, however, that all three contexts outlined in Ball's original policy cycle work (Bowe, Ball, and Gold 1992) can benefit from an engagement with several other interpretive theoretical resources such as the theory of social logics (2007) in developing a trajectory of the English 2013 reforms. Moreover, I argued that a problem-driven trajectory study of English reform should analyse the empirical corpus with a process of theory-testing and hypothesis forming. Such an endeavour is vital for moving us towards a reassessment of the values tied up in the reforms, and so an iterative process of moving between theory and the empirical corpus can stretch the utility of these theoretical tools.

The shape of this chapter reflects my aim to provide an extensive critical reading of the 'intellectual roots' of the Conservative education reforms since 2010. This chapter seeks to put forward a series of hypotheses (via

the articulation of social logics.) for thinking about research question one, which considers the core concepts, and discourses that politicians and policy-makers draw upon in talking about teaching and English reform. Thus, I begin with a discussion of the research strategy. This basis provides an argument for the suitability and rationale of the selected corpus of documents and the tools and registers that I deploy in undertaking analytical work. To achieve such a task, I will undertake a documentary analysis which brings together several speeches, White Papers and correspondence as a way of making sense of arguments and policy choices made by education secretaries and policymakers in response to their broader ideas about the purpose and function of schooling. From here, I will focus on the specifics of English provided in the exam board documents and Ofqual policy briefs which are intended to inform schools and teachers about the scope and aims of the 2013 reforms. Finally, I borrow concepts from the *logics of critical explanation* and political rhetorical theory to discuss how politicians have attempted to reorganise and restructure ideas about what is a legitimate teacher-subject.

3.1 Research Strategy

I sought to sketch out several themes and concepts in the literature review, which characterised the general educational backdrop of UK schooling policy since 2010. This chapter looks to develop key themes from the literature by producing a form of discourse analysis on a range of relevant policy documents and speeches. This section outlines how many of the assumptions and tools found within interpretivist frameworks such as the logics approach, problematisation, rhetorical theory and network ethnography can provide an analysis that is *descriptive, explanatory* and *critical* (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 152–153). The research is descriptive in the sense that it provides a range of concepts by which to characterise core discourses and themes in the reforms, primarily through paying attention to what policy-makers or

particular education secretaries say about teaching and English. However, this task is also explanatory in that its tools allow me to sketch out why certain ideas about teaching hold sway with ministers, or how ministers attempt to mobilise key themes through organisational strategies. Finally, the 'reading' of these reforms is furnished with a level of criticality in that it draws on a Foucauldian-inspired attempt to problematise the 'norms and values of the specific practices' of this particular context of English reform (215).

Ultimately, an analyst has to make a judgement about where data starts and ends; I make no claim that the selected corpus fully captures the overwhelmingly exhaustive bank of documents, people and processes which have shaped the reforms. But the 'form' (or genre) and typical construction of these sources (speeches, white papers or final exam board documents) often point to multiple-authorship which is likely to be more reliably indicative of 'a shared conceptual resource' rather than merely the views of one person (Finlayson and Martin 2008, 449). As such these resources provide an opportunity to capture particular political arguments (as ideas and beliefs) as they appear against background and tradition or in response to dilemmas as part of a larger collective (Bevir and Rhodes 2003, 63).

In Bevir and Rhodes, *traditions* refer to non-reified or non-essentialist 'group of ideas' which move down generations whilst shifting a little each time (Bevir and Rhodes 2003, 33). Thus, for my purpose here, this gives me a way to think about how Conservative ministers draw on different beliefs and practices from their community, which in turn provides us with an insight into why they think about things as they do. This concept is not exhaustive; traditions are the starting point and become visible only if a political actor's agency has not led them to change it (Bevir, Rhodes, and Weller 2003, 6). Similarly, *dilemmas* arise when an individual 'adopts a new belief or action' which must accommodate their existing beliefs (36). It is here that we can think

about the way some Conservative MPs on the social right had to reflect on the new role that comprehensive education, rather than grammar schools could play as the new purveyors for developing a traditional, academic knowledge curriculum.

The logics approach is preferable to some of the other archaeological analyses that have tackled policy documents in education (Scheurich 1994; Walton 2010). These studies, which focus on identifying the 'grid of regularities', go a long way in pointing out how an array of practices and objects reproduce often constraining social regularities about a particular policy 'problem' (Scheurich 1994, 306). The subsumption of conscious and intentional agency in analysis to mere reproduction of the dominant order, proposed by the likes of Scheurich, is restrictive, however, when one is trying to think about political language (through debate and speeches) as a reflective exercise or negotiation by a political actor. In any case, the logics approach still incorporates Foucault's ideas about discursive formations through Laclau and Mouffe's conception of 'regularity in dispersion' (Laclau and Mouffe 2014, 106). This points to the idea of dispersion of different elements that are considered 'an ensemble of different elements', within which specific contexts can be conceived as a totality (96). Logics provides a more suitable approach for reading the reforms because it recognises that social actors are understood to reflect and make sense of their worlds, or actively seek to reproduce a dominant order through tactics or fantasy. It also retains an appreciation for the 'form' of a text too, rather than just its content. Speeches serve a function, and even when they were analysed in the form of a text, politics must still be read out of texts (Wiesner, Haapala, and Palonen 2017, 23).

Analytical tools and register(s)

The analytical substance of the research strategy found in this chapter comes from deploying three individual logics found in the *logics of*

critical explanation (Glynos and Howarth 2007). Logics provides three central analytical registers to analyse the 2013 English reforms. These are social, political and fantasmatic and are explained in detail below. They help to 'characterise' and 'elaborate' on a 'number of transformations, stabilisations, and maintenance of regimes and social practices' (133). Individually, specific logics characterise different ways of thinking about dimensions of a text or a corpus, whilst collectively, they allow one to link theoretical and empirical insights through a process of articulation (181). As I will sketch out in this chapter, logics can be usefully integrated with many other similar constructivist approaches, such as rhetoric and problematisation, to provide further the explanatory potential.

Furthermore, where the explanatory potential for logics increases is in its ability to pick up on the diachronic interventions made in the rhetorical and organisational strategies deployed by a politician setting out a particular political argument. In order to increase the power of this, I borrow some terms from contemporary political rhetorical theory such as "tropes", "metaphor" and "metonymy", and its focus on the political arguments of actors (appeals to ethos, pathos and logos) to better understand how the arguments being used actually matter to the way politicians seek to organise their views. Some political arguments try to construct differential chains, which attempt to complexify social relations, and in so doing empower some groups, institutions and individuals (and by implication certain types of knowledge), whilst delegitimising and thus excluding others.

Logics

Social logics demarcate the relatively stable patterns or 'rarefied system of objects' that make up 'a particular social practice or regime' (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 137). Glynos and Howarth talk about the Foucauldian-inspired process of 'archaeological bracketing' as a way of 'identifying a domain of objects and practices' that need our 'analysis

and critique' (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 171; Foucault 2002). It is not sufficient to say that these are *hard* rules because the assumptive principle that social relations are contingent will always provide a contextual richness which 'cannot be [fully] captured' (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 137). Identifying these social logics, and returning to them through an engagement with the empirical corpus and revising them if need be, can help identify the 'dominant, sedimented norms' which structure practice (Glynos, Klimecki, and Willmott 2015, 395). In this sense, social logics are focused on the synchronic axis. This approach allows me to name a number of social logics as a way of characterising the 'Gove reforms'. This naming process means bringing together common themes that appear in the corpus such as 'autonomy', 'core curriculum', and 'social justice', into something that resembles a pattern or constancy of concepts about an idea of teaching. By analysing speeches, in particular, it is possible to go beyond the self-interpretation of political actors to examine not only what they say about a subject, but also how they think it (Finlayson and Martin 2008, 451).

Through 'self-interpretation' and 'thick descriptions' the ontic level of social logics is connected to an 'ontological-informed grammar' in **political logics** (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 161). Political logics refer to a diachronic axis, where social agents attempt to collectively 'mobilise', 'contest', 'defend' or 'transform' social logics through rhetorical or organisational strategies. Through 'equivalence' actors can simplify social relations by bringing together different components in relation to a common 'enemy' (143). Alternatively, by drawing attention to 'difference' between social relations, it is possible to point to how the signifying space can be expanded and complexified (144). Again, my explanatory attempts to sketch out how education ministers move from beliefs to strategy is improved by borrowing some insights from political rhetoric. Paying attention to how political actors use various rhetorical appeals to equivelentially join parents, think tanks and the

teaching profession, means that we are interested in how these tactics and strategies are embedded in political argumentation and not just beliefs (Finlayson 2007). In this domain, political arguments (which deploy various appeals, or empty signifiers) work to close the gap between the number of available narratives for conceiving teaching, and the type of (albeit temporary) 'closure' an education secretary might want to achieve about a series of norms about schooling policy (Laclau 2004, 306–307).

If political logics can show *how* something is challenged or instituted, it is **fantasmatic logics** which help us to ask why subjects can be 'gripped' by certain regimes, even when it is against their interests to be so (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 5). If political reality is produced symbolically through metaphor and metonymic processes (which are articulated through 'master signifiers'), then it is necessary to account for the 'force' that holds these together (145). Fantasy works as ideology in masking the contingent nature of social and political reality, created by the 'lack' in political subjects and structures, by furnishing it with beautific or horrific narratives (147). Beautific narratives point to a 'fullness-to-come' once a named object has been overcome, whereas, the horrific dimension warns of 'disaster-to-come' should an obstacle prove 'insurmountable' (147).

Intervention

This chapter aims for a 'problem-driven' approach to reading the 2013 English reforms. As such, I am interested in understanding how the broader notions of schooling, teaching and English are constructed as an object by the policy-process and politicians. A 'problem-driven' approach opposes itself to 'theory-driven' design, which might be solely concerned with validating the 'correctness' of a particular theory. Instead, theory-testing is made part of the process of moving between the empirical corpus and the theoretical concepts where this iterative

process stretches the concepts of a particular theory. Problematisation also contrasts itself to a 'method-driven' approach too focused on the techniques of data collection and analysis (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 167). As such, problematisation is a process of stepping back to view *thought* as a process that constitutes objects of which it speaks, rather than it referring to a linguistic and psychological act (Deacon 2000, quoted in Bacchi 2012a, 3). For Foucault "thought" is deployed to an object in order 'to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals' (Foucault 1997, 117). In this light, the English reform is read in order to establish it as an object, that is, by analysing how the British state and certain politicians, attempt to construct English and its constituent elements (curriculum, pedagogy, teachers, pupil etc.) as a problematic. Whereas, traditional normative policy analysis might seek to answer questions about what action should be taken, or what weight should be given to this or that in a particular analysis, a poststructuralist research strategy finds its normative 'clout' from a different set of tools through articulation.

It is through articulation that the problematisation strategy joins up with the grounded explanations that have been found in the different registers in the logics approach. In reference to Kant, this process entails a reflective form of judgement[29] where no 'determinate concept is readily available or given' (183) and one has to argue (against positivism) from an internal criterion of credibility, consistency, evidentiary support and exhaustiveness (34), or in judging the study's value, whether it has 'uncovered a particularly rich problematic' (Flyvbjerg 2001, 84). Judgement thus provides the ground for allowing the analyst to make connections between concepts, objects, and to apply 'a logic' to

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[29] Glynos and Howarth point out that reflective judgement is different from 'determinate judgement' whereby a universal rule, principle or law subsumes the particular thing we are judging. A reflective judgement has no a priori conditions and therefore must find the universal itself. Against a naturalism that wants to subsume, a poststructuralist strategy argues that social reality can be found in intuition, theoretical expertise, and the practice of articulation (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 184).

social processes and theoretical frameworks (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 184)

As noted earlier, articulation is the step which draws together and makes links between a plurality of significant logics, as a way of accounting for the problematised phenomenon. Such a process of articulation takes the form of 'naming, generalising and justifying', which brings in the role of judgement, and in so doing ties an analysis to a normative and ethical critique (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 183). In the act of naming social logics, this entails a judgement through which the researcher gathers together different discursive elements by making their links visible (195). Thus, the act of naming a logic can *redescribe* a concept through 'rhetorical displacement' and force the 'emancipation' of that name from its previous conceptual attachment (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 187; Laclau 2007, 109).

Moreover, the analyst, aware that they are involved with political struggle, can name counter-logics that demonstrate the contingency of already-dominant social practices. Showing contingency is itself an ethical project because it attempts to show how subjects come to identify with dominant regimes and practices, or how a regime conceals the openness of social relations and thus tries to shut down alternative views (197). Finally, in generalising its analysis, a logics approach can find ways of explaining and comparing its case-study to 'related causes and instances' within that field and are then generalised (or not) based on whether the case is judged to be an exemplary case with regards to a particular field (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 189).

Ultimately, conducting a problematisation of English reform as the state and various politicians understand it feeds back into the overall research strategy for this thesis. My policy trajectory more broadly asks questions about how the reform itself (or policy-as-discourse), is part of a number of rhetorical and organisational strategies that seek to do more than implement a new set of policy particulars into a school

subject. They embody a more ambitious set of motives to reconstruct or recalibrate what it means to teach in the UK, and explicitly to teach English. Moreover, this analysis follows this attempt towards realignment into the *context of practice,* or the school setting itself. This chapter is, therefore, the start of this process, but the spirit of problematisation follows in the subsequent study chapters and discussion too. By problematising, I will construct an articulation by bringing together some concepts, logics, politicians' self-interpretation, to constitute 'a candidate for truth or falsity' and that can work to transform initial perceptions and understandings about the reform (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 35). My account of the 'case' of school English challenges the explanatory assumptions found in normative policy analyses used to evaluate school policy. Also, at the very least it contributes to the broader social science research currently being conducted in school English by putting the (re)examination of values, the sensitivity of context and engagement with reality and at its centre.

3.2 Reading the Reforms

In May 2017, *The Times* newspaper reported that some of England's leading state schools were 'creating lists' of 100 great poems and books, 100 pieces of classical music and key dates and narratives in British history that their pupil must study (Griffiths 2017). In many ways, the article captures the central elements for understanding the intellectual underpinnings and a handful of key actors (still) involved in school policy reform since 2010 and on. In this case, these key actors include Amanda Spielman, the current chief Ofsted inspector; Rachel de Souza, a chief executive of a Norfolk multi-academy trust; Katherine Birbalsingh, headteacher of the controversial *Michaela Community School*; and *Policy Exchange*, an influential conservative think-tank. The shared arguments given by these key actors in the article for the school-driven policy directive of creating lists of great poems, novels and classical music, is consistent across many of the minister's speeches that

this chapter will draw on. These include support for a traditional, knowledge-driven curriculum based on an Arnoldian-like moral belief in education as 'the great force for human advancement', which is twinned with a moral argument that all children 'deserve' a 'proper corpus of knowledge' (Spielman quoted in Griffiths 2017). This is reinforced because children need an 'education as good as the education kids get at Eaton and Harrow', and so they 'know what people in the club know' (de Souza quoted in Griffiths 2017). Without the cultural capital one 'can't be flexible in [their] thinking or hold the conversations with the kind of people who hold top jobs or go to top universities' (Birbalsingh quoted in Griffiths 2017).

What should we make of this? For a start, the focus on pupils learning classical poetry and novels points to how English as a subject often plays a central part in schooling policy narrative and directives. After all, English policy directs the literacy that acts as the foundation by which other subjects are based (Goodson and Medway 1990, vii). The state's interest in English is found in administration and economy but also in pupil subjectivities: that is, it has a functional and moral interest in the subject (ix). You can see this in the arguments made in *The Times* article. The right type of cultural capital can set you up for the 'top jobs', but it also serves up the 'broad, rich and deep curriculum' that every child deserves (Spielman quoted in Griffiths 2017). The canon becomes the key ingredient for achieving this definition of procedural fairness and meritocracy. Birbalsingh makes this point without flinching from the logical conclusion that those who regularly argue from a cultural traditionalist position take: an antipathy towards popular and media culture— 'after our children have read these works they don't want to

read rubbish or sit watching the TV for hours[30]' (Birbalsingh quoted in Griffiths 2017)[31].

An Educational Worldview

Before analysing the 2013 English reforms, I want to develop a series of social logics to help characterise these reforms as they appear in the policy documentation and speeches of Conservative education secretaries and ministers. This task means conceptualising politicians' arguments to capture the stable patterns across different sources, but also so that I can characterise their political arguments as they might be understood in the competing traditions that appear within British governance and the 2010 Conservative programme (Bevir and Rhodes 2003). As Ken Jones has pointed out, Gove's reforms are driven by two poles of cultural conservatism and the neo-liberalism started by Thatcherism[32]. On the first, he appears as a descendant of generations

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[30] Writing in the LRB, George Duobly (2017) recounts a recent visit to Michaela School and reported the following conversation he had with a pupil, which shows some tension between pupils' outside interests and what the school offered:

'The library doesn't stock magazines,' my guide at Michaela said proudly as we surveyed the shelves.

'Why not?'
'They don't help us learn.'
I asked my other guide, a boy in Year 7, whether he likes reading.
'I do,' he said, with a pained expression, 'but I should really read more non-fiction.'
'What do you read at the moment?'
'Comics and sci-fi stories.'
'You don't enjoy them?'
'I do, but they don't help me learn.'

[31] From educationalist Philip Hartog (writing in 1907) to Denys Thompson (1930s), there has been a recognition that secondary school teachers might play a role drawing pupils attention to popular forms of culture in order 'to recognise the cheap spuriousness of biased newspapers and dishonest advertising' (Shayer 2007, 129). This seems as urgent now given the rise of "fake news", and calls by the OECD's education lead for schools to equip children to know 'what is true from what is not true' (Schleicher quoted in Siddique 2017). The attitude adopted by Binsbalsingh is to side-line this form of analysis from English classroom entirely.
[32] An early supporter David Cameron and the notion of 'red Toryism' Phillip Blond made the point that Cameron's overall projected vision of a different social and *economic* direction to running the country had remained unrealised because of a lack of central direction about the type of conservatism he wanted, and because of the

of English conservatives who baulk at massification and the move towards recognition of non-standard culture and egalitarianism (Jones 2013, 329). With this, however, he incarnates equal opportunity within an understanding of 'working-class intellectuality' and meritocracy, drawing from Jonathan Rose's book *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, which puts forward evidence for working-class thirst for knowledge and self-improvement (332). This cultural conservatism is instilled with a form of neoliberalism which has its roots in Thatcherism and a Hayekian (re)appropriation of equality with procedural fairness which supposedly levels the playing field, so everybody has the chance to compete for the same social and economic goods regardless of background (336). Thus, along with a reform programme that aims to distribute cultural capital to the working classes like an economic good, it makes sense that the Conservatives have accelerated the marketising policies started under New Labour such as the academies programme.

Looking at an extended corpus, some key concepts such as 'evidence', 'support', 'autonomy', and 'knowledge' become significant because of the way they are used and because they appear with some regularity. Using my 'extended corpus' of 95 speeches[33] (approx. 155,000 words) and the two white papers (approx. 80,000 words), I used NVIVOs word frequency function to see what words were most used by politicians and

eventual primacy of the austerity project over everything else. Blond states about the Tory party: 'departments have permission to run with whatever variant of conservatism any minister finds persuasive' (Blond 2012). Therefore, it would be fair to say that Michael Gove (as a political actor pursuing an intellectual programme) is *the* key figure for understanding the type of conservatism that underpins the education reforms. After all, not all figures are easily contained within a party discipline. As Cameron supposedly quipped about Gove to Nick Clegg: 'what you've got to remember about Michael is he is basically a bit of a Maoist—he believes the world makes progress through a process of creative destruction' (Laws 2017). Cameron found himself on the wrong side of this in June 2016.

[33] This includes every speech made by an education secretary or a schools minister since the 2010 coalition, up to the 27th September 2017 which is available in the gov.uk archives. These are predominantly Conservative politicians but people such as the Liberal Democrat David Laws feature because he was schools minister during the coalition.

policymakers. If we consider the top two results 'school' and 'schools' once combined register 6,584 hits (or 3.25% coverage across the corpus) and second 'education' (1,905 hits, 0.94% coverage), then the words 'support' (680 hits, 0.34% coverage which rises to 868 with stems 'ing' and 'ed'), 'knowledge' (501 hits, 0.25% coverage) and 'evidence' (341 hits, 0.17% coverage) are certainly prominently featured[34]. They are nestled amongst a number of other words that bubble out of the master discourse of performance which organises 21st-century schooling: 'new' (1,181), 'best' (886), 'system' (838), 'leaders' (524), 'standards' (504), 'quality' (447), 'performance' (355), 'improve' (352), 'now' (490) 'autonomy' (273), 'accountability' (198 or 344 with its stem 'able'). Their frequency in the corpus provides us with some insight into how the politicians and policy-makers evoke language within a dominant frame, and this only gets narrower once NVIVO computes their synonyms too. Although these words point to certain regularities in the text, it does not tell us how 'knowledge' or 'evidence' connect with other themes. A political actor seeking clarity over their (controversial) definition entails in a sort of political action (Wiesner, Haapala, and Palonen 2017, 24). My interest as a qualitative analyst is to interrogate how these terms are being used (or misused) by the people who evoke them, for talking about schooling policy. The next section takes on this task.

A Programme for Professional Autonomy

In the analysis, I contend that the idea of 'professional autonomy' acts as a pivotal concept to bring together ideas from the political traditions of neoconservatism and neoliberalism. Through a discursive reorganisation in speeches and documents, concepts such as autonomy, accountability, and pedagogy are deployed as an ambitious reform package that does the work of constructing a particular understanding

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[34] NVIVO calculates 13,359 unique words in the extended corpus. Only 2565 words register as achieving 0.01% coverage and a mere 70 words feature more than 0.17% coverage. These include along with the examples already given, terms such as 'teacher', 'pupil', 'government', 'national', 'curriculum', 'English', 'also'.

about what it supposedly means to teach. Table 1. maps out how projected social logics form the nodal point/master signifier of professional autonomy.

I focus on three key tenets that make up this "programme" of professional autonomy, by characterising ideas found in the policy texts and speeches. There is an essential role for the way knowledge (*the social logics of knowledge-dispersion*) is constructed in these reforms, as forms of pedagogy directed by cognitive science, as well as constituting a particular notion of social justice (as fairness). Furthermore, part of the promise of the reforms is their ability to provide more professional freedom to practitioners to take charge of the processes of schooling and teaching, whilst the state focuses its attention on outcomes (*the social logics of outcome-based evaluation*). These two components are worked within a specific mode of responsibilisation (*the social logics of responsibilisation*) which gains its power through fantasmatic appeals to teachers' desires to free themselves from government control but organised within a particular frame where what is expected of them is a standard set by the state through a number of processes and procedures.

The notion (and master signifier) of 'professional autonomy' provides the government with a 'focal point for containing and disarming those political logics that threaten to unsettle the narrow scope and trajectory of debates over reform' (Glynos, Klimecki, and Willmott 2015, 398). It is not a neutral term; it forms a key part in justifying the reforms and masking any contingency through a measure of fantasy. As I will show, it connects itself to a projected vision of a responsiblised teaching profession that incorporates a fantasmatic promise of freedom from bureaucracy, enabled by the managerial, technical tools of data and evidence, which also play their part in helping to construct an evidence-based 'what works' pedagogy. This programme sets out to redefine expertise and bring about 'new alignments of knowledge, power and

politics' (Janet Newman and Clarke 2018, 41). Although, this is represented in a "reasonable" evidence-informed framework and mobilised by active "teacher-researchers", it also signals that there is a more public attempt to draw frontiers between 'respsonsiblised' teachers and researchers that might legitimately take on the mantle of this supported autonomy, against those that might stand in the way.

Nodal Point of Professional Autonomy	
Projected Social Logics	**Characterisation**
Professional autonomy	Professional autonomy (also referred to as 'supported autonomy' or 'guided autonomy'), is the "master signifier" that characterises the 'respsonsiblised', imagined identity of teachers, their 'good' practice and the relationship they understand to have with the state. In my analysis, it acts as a nodal point to hold together a seemingly disparate number of social logics and practices found through changes to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.
Knowledge-dispersion	Knowledge-dispersal is a social logic that characterises the development of a knowledge-based curriculum within the 2013 reforms. It refers to a curriculum that fuses together moral and social justice arguments with rationalistic economic components. It characterises 'teacher-led' teaching. It is a combination of intellectual conservatism with the tools of measurement and rationality found in neoliberalist programmes. Teachers who engage with a knowledge-based curriculum are part of the 'evidence-informed' profession.
Outcome-based evaluation	Outcome-based evaluation captures the Conservative government's drive towards judging performance based on outcome data rather than processes. This encapsulates teaching performance, pedagogy and assessment. The technical dimension to this is provided by "intelligent accountability' which refers to the accountability relationship that underpins and enables professional autonomy. It also characterises more concrete practices associated with the 'rhetoric of necessity' that underpins the need to develop data infrastructures in schools.
Responsibilisation (Responsibility-shifting)	Responsibilisation characterises the way teachers understand their relationship to the 21st century state. It encapsulates how modern governments have attempted to 'free' workers and instead set the boundaries. It characterises how the state *makes* social problems into issues of self-care (Lemke 2002). Though responsibilisation is mobilised through the technical programmes of government, it also provokes an affective dimension. The workings of "self-esteem" refer to the more ideological-driven dimension to responsibilisation. It is the logic that characterises how reform changes are supposed to allow a teacher to *feel* that they are controlling their professional work and identity (A. Wright 2012, 291).

Table 1. shows social logics forming the 'node of professional autonomy'

The Logics of Knowledge-Dispersion

Improving outcomes is not simple, but the principle underlying important reforms is: knowledge is power

(Gibb 2017b)

Knowledge has been a key concept in the Conservative reforms since 2010. Its intellectual roots can be found in an international context where academics such as E. D. Hirsch form the thinking about the curriculum (Jones 2013, 329). This focus on knowledge is twinned with a neoconservative thinking that 'treats 1968 as a year of the damned, when relativism first crept into the intellectual word and whose values had hitherto been stable' (329). This 'moral relativism' has prevented any defence of our culture from being mounted with any 'self-confidence and vigour' (Gove 2006, 114). A traditional knowledge curriculum offers a way out of this. Ministers have influenced by the work of E.D. Hirsch and Daniel Willingham in developing and justifying a core, slimmed-down academic curriculum. Nick Gibb recalls how as shadow minister, he read Hirsch and got the feeling that he had taken his own 'inchoate and disparate thoughts of education' and managed to turn them into an 'intellectually robust case for action' (Gibb 2015a, 12). A spate of books and articles from Hirsch and Willingham (Hirsch 1988; Hirsch 2006; Willingham 2006; Willingham 2009b) have informed the curriculum reforms, and these discussions around knowledge have found their way into statutory documentation and have furnished terms such as cultural literacy its policy direction and content. Thus, according to *Policy Exchange*: 'a traditional, academic approach is the best way to raise standards in schools, and eventually achieve social justice' (Porter and Simons 2015, 8).

Firstly, with the curricular reforms, *knowledge-dispersal* is framed in terms of every single pupils' entitlement to access the 'best that has been thought and written' (DfE 2016, 89):

> *We may not all be able to inherit good looks or great houses,
> but all of us are heir to the amazing intellectual achievements
> of our ancestors. We can all marvel at the genius of
> Pythagoras, or Wagner, share in the brilliance of Shakespeare
> or Newton, delve deeper into the mysteries of human nature
> through Balzac or Pinker, by taking the trouble to be
> educated...I believe that denying any child access to that
> amazing legacy, that treasure-house of wonder, delight,
> stimulation and enchantment by failing to educate them to
> the utmost of their abilities is as great a crime as raiding their
> parents bank accounts - you are stealing from their rightful
> inheritance, condemning them to a future poorer than they
> deserve.*

(Gove 2011c)

This 'treasure-house' provision cannot be relied on to take place outside of schools in the museums, libraries and galleries because 'without the benefit of educated parents', 'disadvantaged children' must rely on the 'school curriculum to provide the intellectual foundation' (Gibb 2016e). Gove has similarly appropriated a (revolution-lite) Gramscian argument for core knowledge, whereby a conservative knowledge-rich curriculum can lead to progressive ends for disadvantaged pupils (Gove 2013a; Hirsch 1988; Thompson 2013). Gibb has referred to the way knowledge can emancipate a child from 'geographical, historical and personal parochialism of everyday life' (Gibb 2016g). Tied to this argument is an emotive appeal justifying the importance of knowledge for all. Gove has at times framed the reforms as the 'civil rights issue of our time' (borrowing such language it seems from Obama) (Gove 2013g). This line of thinking is in *The Times* article discussed earlier for schools dispersing this knowledge on to their pupils as a social good. E.D Hirsch prefers the word 'transmit', as in schools should 'transmit the shared knowledge or of a standard language—to transmit the cultural commons of a nation, its public sphere' (Hirsch 2006, 68).

Notably, there is a tension here, between Hirsch's rationale that knowledge-dispersion acts as an almost Parsonian functionalist social glue, whereas the argument given by leading policy actors is that such knowledge should be gained so *their* [our] pupils can talk to those in

the 'club'! This is *vertical* levelling if one ever saw it. John Yandell (2017) makes the point that co-opting the opposition language is a counter-revolutionary tactic. Thatcherites did in the 1980s with the introduction of the National Curriculum, when it was presented as a means for ensuring that all pupils (regardless of background or gender) have access to the 'same good and relevant curriculum and programmes of study' (DfES 1987). In this iteration, we see how this tactic is visible in the way teachers should approach teaching poetry. This mirrors Gove's (2011c) attempt to co-opt "lesbian French literature" (and with it, the object that cultural analysts have held in the universities), into one that simply provides objective access to the poetic form, whilst 'denying any opportunity for the exploration of difference, of subjectivity" (Yandell 2017, 248).

Secondly, the *logics of knowledge-dispersion* characterises a rationalisation of both curriculum and pedagogy. This intervention is tied inextricably to the inclusion of cognitive psychology, which has 'shed fresh light on long-running debates' about skills and knowledge (DfE 2016, 89). This intervention of cognitive psychology in education has been a powerful influence for the way teaching, and teachers are conceived in ministers' speeches and how 'knowledge' has become the central concern:

> *What makes teaching most challenging is its central component; namely, changing what is happening in your pupils' minds and ensuring knowledge and important concepts are retained in their long-term memory. Whether teaching pupils their times tables, explaining the process of longshore drift or teaching pupils to distinguish a between a crotchet and a quaver, teachers are presenting pupils with information that they hope will be transferred to their long-term memory.*

> (Gibb 2017a)

From this, the role of the teaching profession is to pass on knowledge because it is the right thing to do for promoting progressive ends *and*

because the 'evidence' says it is the best way to teach children to learn. Teachers are the mediating component between *delivering* a curriculum and providing children with effective learning. They best achieve the 'complex art' of their practice by effectively ordering 'factual knowledge' (Gibb 2017a). Gibb refers to Willingham's argument that we are curious people but 'unless the [cognitive] conditions are right, we will 'avoid thinking' (Willingham cited in Gibb 2017a). Furthermore, too much 'distracting information' can affect long-term retention (Gibb 2017a) because we can only hold 'five to seven pieces of information' in our 'working memory at any one time' (Gibb 2016a).

In shaping up the debate about pedagogy, what in the narrow sense 'works' (provided by the trope 'what works') becomes a legitimate part of informing the evidence-base of these reforms, at the expense of the 'anti-knowledge' and thus the 'anti-evidence - position in education debates' (Gibb 2016d). Here 'evidence' as defined by recourse to adopting knowledge-based teaching and learning, becomes the *logos* of the reform argument; the Conservative Party attempt to place themselves on the logical, rational side of the debate. Such a strategy allows for selective, defined use of 'evidence' because there would be little point engaging with the illogical, anti-knowledge movement.

Thirdly, the *logics of knowledge-dispersion* is linked inextricably to pupils being competitive both domestically and globally. References to the knowledge economy play into a lineage of influence from management discourse popularised in the 1960s (M. Clarke 2015, 73). It has become ever more prevalent in 'eduspeak' and refers to the argument that within the new economy, 'the possession of knowledge, rather than ownership of capital or material resources would be the key factor determining wealth and success' (73). New Labour's curriculum had contained 'too much that is not essential' and needed to be replaced with a slimmed-down curriculum that stretches standards to match 'the best in the world' (DfE 2010a, 17). The benefits of knowledge are framed

within the 'knowledge-economy' and are referred explicitly to in both white papers since 2010 and minister's speeches. It is at this point that we might identify with the semantic field of performativity (as in the neoliberal tradition), even if Gove does his level best to dress it up:

Globalisation may be a moderately ugly word for what is really just the victory of liberal economics or Victorian political economy over its rivals - but its consequences of globalisation for those without qualifications are truly ugly... The more connected, and numerous, your population of well-educated citizens are, the greater the potential for intellectual collaboration and creativity, driving innovation and growth

(Gove, 2011, Cambridge)

Since 2010, Conservative politicians have tried to tickle the profession's esteem, setting teachers up as impactful nation-builders. There is Nicky Morgan's reference to teachers as 'the pinnacle of the community'(Morgan 2016), or Michael Gove, riffing off the Romantics, to describe teachers as the 'unacknowledged legislators of mankind' (Gove 2013e) and Nick Gibb's teachers as 'the candles of our nation' (Gibb 2016b). Here, domestic nation-building is understood in terms of success on an international stage, both for the benefit of British citizens and to 'ensure that the place of learning in our culture and civilisation is protected, and enlarged' (Gove 2011c). It is teachers who give children 'the tools' to be 'builders of a better world' (Gove 2013e). Berating the skills and "creativity" movement, headed by Ken Robinson, Gibb argues that the 'best preparation for securing a good job is a solid grounding in core academic subjects' (2015). A Google-era insistence of 'you can just look it up', flexible pedagogies, and new technologies will not 'spark' 'an education revolution' of their own accord (Gove 2013e; Gibb 2016a). Instead, school ministers 'underestimate the importance of knowledge at [their] peril' in trying to find the 'optimal mixture' of 'knowledge, attitudes and character traits' to produce an 'enterprising and entrepreneurial population'

(Gibb 2016a). Knowledge, therefore, becomes the underestimated currency by which our nation's success now rests; it becomes 'inert, fixed, stable—ready to be delivered, more like a sack of potatoes than a box of delights, to the next generation' (Yandell 2017, 250).

The Logics of Outcome-based Evaluation (for intelligent accountability)

According to Gove and Gibb, the intellectual foundations of the *autonomy* in their reforms can be located in a Millian liberal tradition, where states provide 'finance' and set 'high expectations' but the management of 'day-to-day learning is devolved' (Gove 2011c). Gibb makes similar overtures with his 'fruits of autonomy' trope, finding inspiration in Victorian constitutionalist Walter Bagehot's dictum that policies cannot be 'suddenly made' but need to 'grow' (Gibb 2015g) and in a Beveridge-inspired liberalism, where 'secession is the midwife of invention' (Gibb 2014b). Despite this, Gove, Gibb and Morgan have on separate occasions referred more generally to their preference for synthetic phonics in primary schools and funded pilot programmes to push this into schools (Gibb 2015c). Moreover, these same ministers have linked the work of cognitive behavioural psychology to the development of 'evidence-based' reading strategies (Gibb 2016c). Moreover, they have looked internationally at Shanghai and drawn on PISA findings to argue for more 'effective' teacher-led classroom instruction (Gibb 2017a), in addition to reforming Ofsted's 'reign of error' in discouraging teacher-led practice (Gibb 2015f).

Ultimately, however, unlike New Labour's infamous centralised lesson plans, and literacy and numeracy hour strategies, the Conservatives have been conscious (at least rhetorically) to be seen to be reducing the amount of official government diktat passed on to teachers when it comes to methods. Instead, politicians have argued for a "hands-off" approach to protect teachers from the 're-emergence' of a 'micromanaging government' and have instead opted to fund strategies

and programmes such as Educational Endowment Foundation toolkit (EEF), a new teaching journal and set up a new Independent College of Teachers, to mirror The Royal Society of Medicine (DfE 2016, 15):

> *We believe that outcomes matter more than methods, and that there is rarely one, standardised solution that will work in every classroom for government to impose.... so this government will very rarely dictate how these outcomes should be achieved – it will encourage and support teachers and leaders to develop the best possible solutions for their pupils, and will hold them to account for rigorous, fairly-measured outcomes.*

(DfE 2016, 9)

Thus, it is possible to think about the reforms as the *social logics of outcome-based evaluation*. The Conservatives have been at pains to explain how many of the bureaucratic structures under New Labour have gone. This trend follows a strand of governmentality literature whereby the state promotes more 'freedom' at the level of the individual and allows actors to 'assume responsibility' for the consequences and effects of their actions (Dean 2010, 48). Importantly though, this increasingly works on and through the identities of subjects and not merely the docile bodies of Foucault's prisoners in *Discipline and Punishment*. This plane is where the idealised classical liberalism evoked by Conservative ministers connects with their commitment to the tools of the neoliberal order. It is in their refinement of terms such as bureaucracy, accountability and autonomy that the notion of *intelligent accountability* becomes most pertinent for practice.

Naming the *social logics of intelligent accountability* is a way of characterising several relatively concrete ideas and practices about how school leaders and teachers understand their relationship to the state in terms of accountability. It is a term used by successive governments, first by David Miliband when he was New Labour's schools' minister (Miliband 2004, 3) and has appeared regularly in Conservative minister's speeches (Gove 2012b; Gibb 2016g) and the

2016 White Paper (DfE 2016, 79). Intelligent accountability might be understood as 'a new relationship' between the state and schools where the school receives more 'time, support and information' in return for 'improved data flows' (Miliband 2004, 1). Under the Conservatives, individual teachers supposedly gain 'classroom autonomy', in return for a cleaner, sweeping, high-stakes data at the end of key stage assessments (Gibb 2010). Moreover, Gove has referred to the 'old bureaucratic', (2010c) sluggish state receiving too much 'upwards' data, whereas much more should flow downwards to parents and communities so they can 'slice' and 'dice' the data to see where schools are performing 'well or badly' (Gove 2012c). This ambition moves to 'dismantle the apparatus of central control and bureaucratic compliance', to make 'direct accountability' more 'meaningful' and in 'standardised format' (DfE 2010a, 66). It is also consistent with the Conservatives removing 21,000 pages of state-level bureaucracy but making available 14 million lines of exam data for 'third parties' to allow communities and parents to make better choices (Gove 2011a).

Ministers have been particularly keen to develop systems of assessment that can aid accountability measures. This system ultimately combines centralism bound by a collective agreement to collect clean, high-stakes data that can 'drive up standards and remove perverse incentives' (DfE 2016, 105). In her letter to Michael Gove, Glenys Stacey (formerly in charge of Ofqual) acknowledges that a key (albeit unrealistic) driver for EBacc, has been to provide more 'effective' and 'reliable data for accountability purposes' than traditional GCSEs could ever offer (Stacey 2012). Moreover, the replacement of centrally determined levels at the other key stages now means that schools have been required to develop their systems, 'to match timing and content of their school curriculum' (Gibb 2015b). Levels had produced a 'distracting, over-generalised label' which had 'clogged up the education system with undependable data on pupil

attainment' (Gibb 2015b). Instead, a national standard is measured at the end of the key stages, and it, therefore, falls to the 'professionalism of the schools' to make sure their pupils reach the standard by then (Gibb 2015b).

As a result of *the logics of intelligent accountability*, schools increasingly understand their roles as part of a 'computational project' where data dependency encourages a 'shift away from contextualised and informed expert analysis' to 'rules derived from reoccurring data patterns' (Ozga 2017, 20). The result is a further entrenchment of the 'empowerment movement' which conceals social forces such as the effects of deprivation and places the responsibility for outcomes on individual teachers. A great deal of literature has been devoted to explaining the development of 'data infrastructures' in schooling (Ozga 2009; Lawn and Ozga 2009; Sellar 2015b). Data infrastructures are challenging old ways of democratic organisation, with the 'power afforded to those groups whose values and political agendas are inscribed within data infrastructures', though it is not always transparent who this is (Sellar 2015b, 767). Moreover, extraordinary amounts of energy are spent on developing tracking systems for assessing the progress of pupils. Data is often 'deified' to validate teaching practice (Hardy and Lewis 2016, 6) thus subjecting teachers to a regime of 'performativity' through these practices (Ball 2003).

From a reading of this corpus, teaching continues to be a tightly monitored and challenging profession, and one affected by fast-paced changes. A thousand flowers blooming? Perhaps a thousand daffodils drooping. Tired teachers and school leaders can, of course, tap into the rich reservoir of tested, ready-available evidence-based practices available to them through the EEF toolkit and the neatly-packaged meta-analyses of John Hattie. In fact, 48% already have (Gibb 2015f). The presentation of the toolkit is metric-based and condenses thousands of metanalyses into a star rating, cost-effectiveness,

evidence-strength and the supposed impact (in months) on learning. It is worth noting the link here between outcome-based evaluation and the conception of knowledge posited by the government. Knowledge about education is evaluated on the basis that it can be transferred cleanly from research to the institution.

The Logics of Responsibilisation

The logics of responsibilisation helps to sketch out these concepts of autonomy and intelligent accountability further. The first point is that there has been a drive from states to shift responsibility (responsibility-shifting) on to individuals, whether this is schools, teachers, parents or children, for the outcome of success. This is pertinent for thinking about education in general. For instance, Bernard Barker's contention that the current schooling accountability system is narrowly conceived and based on the workings of individual merit and education as a 'self-help' system (Barker 2010, 158). In this sense, Gove's agenda intensifies the policies aimed at promoting procedural fairness, opportunities and access that inevitably narrows a fuller notion of achievement (epitomised in New Labour's *Every Child Matters*) to attainment by grades. It is possible to see this in the way the Ofsted criteria was slashed from 27 graded points to just five, with many of those removed referring to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and community contribution. Thus, he berates the right for pushing intelligence as a 'fixed commodity' and then the left for fixing the 'fates' of the poor (Gove 2013c). This is because both positions deny teachers their power to transform the lives of their pupils.

The second aspect of responsibilisation can be understood through how it ties to the *social logics of self-esteem*. Adam Wright (2012) has discussed how the 2010 coalition's policies offer the illusion of freedom from the state, by letting teachers set their targets, and manage themselves, but only in return for them to engage in a 'regime of self-

criticism, self-discipline and self-assessment', so as to keep 'external forces of control at arm's length' (A. Wright 2012, 292). Following Lemke, neo-liberal rationality 'shifts' social risks and 'life in society into the domain for which the individual is responsible' and transforms this into 'a problem of "self-care"' (Lemke 2002, 61). The increasing 'responsibilisation' of professionals refers, in John Clarke's terms, to the way citizens are framed and understood by a 'set of injunctions about reasonable choices and responsible behaviour' (2005, 451). Lemke and Wright both draw on Barbara Cruikshank who sketches out the presence of the *self-esteem* movement in America, a political process which promises a revolution 'against the (wrong) way of governing ourselves', and 'not by altering structures like capitalism' (Lemke 2002, 61). This engagement through existing and new boundaries helps to establish a new form of re-professionalization (A. Wright 2012, 292) and as such, engenders a sort of 'cruel optimism' where teachers who engage in the discourse of professionalism are guided through the 'inclusions and exclusions' and 'a structure of relations' that ultimately organises how we think about teaching (Berlant 2011; Moore and Clarke 2016, 672).

Two dimensions of fantasy help to embed this ideological strategy. Firstly, it is crucial to recognise that narratives of fantasy are being deployed to win the argument about the reforms to the general public and the vast majority of teachers. This consensus requires a tropological arrangement where social agents work to develop a 'typology of tropes' which can hide contingency and suggest that 'one kind of tropological arrangement can be regarded as more authentic or ethical than others' (Glynos 2001, 199). For fantasy to be effective, it has to 'embody the general public's view, or at least the relevant audience's view' (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 174). When Gove writes in *The Mail* that 'you have to take sides', he is referring to both teachers and parents who have a vested interest in whether schools strike, and where public opinion

might lie (2013b). This work forms through a 'horrific' fantasy, which 'foretells of disaster if the obstacle proves insurmountable' (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 147). Not overcoming these obstacles will lead to the teaching profession being shackled to the ideologues who draw 'gifted young teachers from their profession' and have held children back from achieving (Gove 2013b).

Secondly, fantasy is deployed through a 'beautific' narrative that these reforms will free teachers from the bureaucracy laid on them by a New Labour government, and will give them real control in their profession. The master signifier 'professional autonomy' emerges as the only option for the teaching profession to adopt:

> *Clearing away the distractions and slashing the unnecessary bureaucracy and central prescription which sapped so much of teachers' time and energy; in numbers alone, we've removed or simplified over 50 unnecessary duties and regulations; and cut the volume of guidance issued to schools by 75%, over 21,000 pages. And giving teachers as much freedom, autonomy and independence as possible, to get on with they do best - teach. Every teacher in the classroom knows - as Gerard Kelly so rightly said - that teaching is the noblest of professions.*

> (Gove 2013e)

This draws on a beautific narrative, where there is a promise of 'a fullness-to-come' by adopting a series of reforms that offer teachers 'unprecedented freedom to teach as they see fit, without an overbearing education bureaucracy driving their actions' (Gibb 2016b) and through invitations to be part of a respected evidence-based profession (Gove 2013c). These logics work in line with a larger form of self-esteem and responsibilisation already outlined earlier in the chapter. They refer to Adam Wright's reading of the 'empowerment agenda' organised by the *social logics of self-esteem* and *responsibilisation* (2012, 291). The 'grip' here though, is that teachers want freedom from government and they want to develop a profession that is respected. Gove suggests that 'perceptions of the teaching profession' rests not with 'what Ofsted

inspectors or the media say' but on what 'teachers do' (Gove 2013c). As Moore and Clarke have suggested, everyone who considers themselves to be professional 'may not agree at a conscious level what this has come to signify in official discourses, but we still want to *be* professional' (Moore and Clarke 2016, 671). Through these reforms, the government has attempted to set up a new relationship between teachers and the state as one of developing 'professional autonomy', and in so doing, provides a powerful master signifier from which a fixed conception of professionalism can be mobilised. Referring to a pre-professional era without evidence-based methods, like Gibb when he invokes a previous era of education 'rife with partisan, methodological unsound and next-to-irrelevant research,' only helps to fuel this desire for better times ahead. (Gibb 2016g).

Within the 2013 reforms and the broader discourses around pedagogy, a 'respsonsiblised' teacher is one that adapts their craft to the evidence-based tools that 'work', initiated by government schemes and taken on by a small group of enthusiasts. Gibb says that the central government can take some credit for leading this charge when they commissioned Ben Goldacre (2013) to expose the 'un-evidence practices' rife in education (Gibb 2015f). The net effect of these social logics on teacher's contextualised understanding is that they are to understand that the onus for the success or failure rests on them and it is they who need to set the professional standards for their profession (Gove 2013c). As such, teachers are compelled to seek out the best 'evidence-informed' practices in order to master their craft. This shift in emphasis is an end that has been pursued doggedly by Nick Gibb, through his interventions at the *ResearchEd* conferences, speeches to PGCE students and through funding the EEF to the current sum of £57 million (Gibb 2015f). Gove has talked about the role the profession must play in creating ever-more data (as evidence) about what works in order to 'identify 'techniques which work and quickly abandon ideologies which don't' (2010a).

Responsibility-shifting has involved moving responsibility away from central government and attempted to redefine the role universities play in pedagogic training too. Gibb, for instance, points to how previous attempts to conduct a research trial initiated by Durham University failed in schools. Two reasons were provided to explain this. One was that teachers were too overburdened with work to have time to spend on research. The other point was that 'many research papers are written in near indecipherable language' (Gibb 2016g) and he draws on a remark made by Robert Coe who was recalling something he was told during his training days by a senior colleague:

> *Lecturers in the university have to justify their existence with all that pointless theory - they'd be worried education is not a proper subject without it. And they need something to cover that they couldn't hack it in the classroom. But once you start working in a school you'll soon forget that stuff, and you'll never miss it.*

<div align="right">(Robert Coe quoted in Gibb 2016g)</div>

From this anecdote, Gibb uses his speech to promote how teachers can now engage in the EEF toolbox and never end up in a situation where evidence is not available to them. This argument attempts to 'empty' the previous space of pedagogy, by drawing the focus away from universities and LEA providers, to a space where teachers can inform themselves through their self-generated research (or the EEF toolbox). Above all, professional 'supported autonomy' is about minimising confusion about the sort of active and responsible choices teachers need to make in order to achieve successful outcomes (DfE 2016, 89). The gambit for politicians is that this opens up "guided freedom" where teachers understand the rules of the game and the space for risk-taking is minimised because there is a necessary engagement with the 'performativity' criterion set by intelligent accountability (Solomon and Lewin 2016).

Developing chains of equivalence is characterised by its attempt to simplify the political space by drawing up equivalences between various

components of a social group (like all teachers), in relation to a common 'enemy' (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 144). This is the construction of political logics, where antagonistic chains are formed between one group vs another. Conservative politicians deploy this tactic through the way they frame themselves, and their reforms, as on the side of the majority of teachers. In the first instance, a number of powerful metaphors are used to embolden teachers and the majority of the teaching profession as important nation-builders (Gibb 2016b; Morgan 2015b; Gove 2013e), as 'professionals not labourers' (Gove 2013c), as being the 'best young generation of teachers ever' (Gove 2013d). Rhetoric about being on the side of teachers is deployed in almost every speech by ministers and education secretaries, and white papers. These tactics, however, can be read as a more significant attempt to draw the government and the majority of teachers together against a common enemy 'hell-bent' on stopping reforms that will help 'great heads' and 'outstanding teachers' (Gove 2013b). In constructing a common enemy, ministers have in mind 'those of a sociological bent' (Gibb 2016b) or those that are 'anti-knowledge' (Gibb 2016d). These are the 'academics' that 'run the university departments of education responsible for developing curricular and teacher training courses', bureaucrats and the unions (Gove 2013b). They are constructed under the recognisable signifier 'The Blob', first used by the former Chief Inspector of Ofsted, Chris Woodhead:

> *School reformers in the past often complained about what was called The Blob – the network of educational gurus in and around our universities who praised each others' research, sat on committees that drafted politically correct curricula, drew gifted young teachers away from their vocation and instead directed them towards ideologically driven theory.*

(Gove 2013b)

Gove lumps together these academics and 'ultra-militants' in the unions by drawing these groups under another signifier 'Marxists' (Gove 2013b). He sets up a frontier between the teachers that want to get on and the

'enemies of promise'. An urgency is constructed by Gove when he exclaims that this is a battle 'you have to take sides on' to ensure 'support for the great teachers and heads fighting for higher standards for the sake of our children' (Gove 2013b). Within this gesture of bringing together the vast majority of teachers under one common banner, Gove attempts to dismantle the power of unions and deflect the broader reservations that many teachers hold about the scope and pace of the reforms. This content is from an article written in the *Daily Mail* and appears more abrasive and confrontational than his other speeches. Writing an opinion piece in a tabloid is an attempt to reach a wider audience and garner parental support too which might be aided by the wider circulation of the *Daily Mail* than his speeches.

3.3 Conclusion

The "Gove reforms" are best understood as an assemblage of ideas that include intellectual conservatism regarding questions of culture and an intrinsic valuing of teaching, teachers and learning, but twinned with organisational professionalism that depends on accountability structures found within the managerialist, neoliberalist tradition. These tenets are bound together within a programme of "professional autonomy", which itself becomes a key nodal point in the reform agenda. There are a couple of key things to draw out to answer research question one which asks about how the state conceives of ideas about teaching and teachers in the "Gove reforms".

"Professional Expertise" and Teaching

The programme of knowledge-dispersion, outcomes and responsibilsation has posited a particular direction for teaching. Indeed, a renewed version of professionalism and pedagogic space have been left open for teachers to pursue. Callaghan's 'secret garden', has been wrenched open, and despite the overtures of reducing the data burden,

politicians and the public demand more intelligent accountability, 'more data', 'clearer information about teaching techniques that get results' and more 'scientifically-robust data about pedagogies that succeed' (Gove 2010a). This thinking is about 'reframing' the teaching profession, and embedding it in "the science of learning": neuroscience, cognitive psychology, meta-analyses from the Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF), and "gold standard" randomised controlled testing. Teachers are being asked to master data systems and algorithms so that they can 'calibrate the balance of probabilities' for effective strategies (Freedman 2018). There is a key connection to "knowledge" here and what it means to "know something". In the Gove reforms, knowledge is accumulated as 'knowable' things, rather than something phenomenological. It is on this point that the knowledge curriculum and thinking about teaching overlap. Within these reforms, the teacher is not a professional able to "judge" or act creatively, but someone who possesses and applies the knowledge, both in transferring it to pupils and in order to inform their own measurable progress.

The reforms have thus been driven by highly motivated political actors that engage with teaching communities online. The programme of ideas is disseminated and packaged to teachers through think tanks such as Policy Exchange, a growing network of self-styled "teacher-researchers" working outside of the traditional institutions of teacher-training, (on Twitter, for example). This chapter (and thesis) focuses less on how ideas and knowledges have been circulated, but more around how politicians and policy-makers attempt to posit their programme of reforms through speeches documents. Regardless, scoping how certain actors are privileged through political argumentation, that forms chains of equivalence and difference, it is possible to conceive of future research that analyses a way policy is being increasingly solidified by key actors outside government.

Problematisation and Policy Trajectory

All this has important ramifications for the way English is ultimately conceived: how its teachers are understood to teach and how its pupils are understood to learn. The role this chapter plays in developing my policy trajectory is in detailing and asking questions about how policy ideas are formed at the *context of influence*. The rest of the thesis explores how this programme plays out in the context of a secondary school English department. It attempts to explore how both resistance and reality lead to divergences from and convergences with the policy aims and ambitions set out in the Gove reforms.

Bacchi starts with the assumption that policy is a prescriptive text which sets out 'practice that that relies on a particular problematisation' (Bacchi 2012a, 4). As I now move on to outline my three study chapters, the clarity that seems to be afforded here in the eventual culmination of school-based policy (from state to school) is not necessarily widespread, nor the case in reality. This is because such a directive is bound up in overall practice, and the concept of teaching *practice* is a complex matter. Practice, as Foucault explains, is also where problematisations emerge (Bacchi 2012a, 2). One starts on the surface by observing how practices 'render complex relational phenomena problematic' (4) as well as how the act of description itself opens us up to 'revealing modes of governing that shape lives and subjectivities' (5). Exploring practice in its context might throw light on a dominant regime, but it also highlights where practice diverges from policy prescription in its institutional context. Divergence and convergence from policy goals is a theme I explore in the following chapters.

Chapter Four

Reform in its Institutional Context(s)

The previous chapter analysed key tenets of the English reforms as they have been constructed within ministers' speeches, White Papers and Ofqual documents. I argued that key concepts such as 'autonomy', 'knowledge', and 'cultural literacy', have been reworked to fit a conservative programme that is organised by the poles of cultural conservatism and neoliberalism. With a change of government in 2010, new stakeholders have been empowered, and new organisational practices have been developed to intervene on the professional subjectivities of teachers. The master signifier of 'professional autonomy' unifies many constitutive elements into an educational programme that has recalibrated ideas about what it means to teach and be a teacher. This has intensified some of New Labour's ideas on accountability and autonomy, and made old ideas new with regards to the traditional curriculum, drawing on particular readings of concepts such as cultural literacy. My use of the logics of critical explanation demonstrated the contingency of these ideas, but they are discursively and rhetorically worked into a powerful ideological, political and technical strategy that narrows or masks alternative ways of articulating educational issues. The extent to which these policy discourses play out at an institutional level is the theme of the following three empirical chapters.

Guided by research question two, this chapter argues that institutional contexts shape policy ambitions and goals and the enactment processes of practitioners. Ultimately, then, despite policymakers' best intentions, policy aims are subject to several divergences, as a result of the interpretive acts that teachers make with regards to their planning and practice in context, and convergences with intense discursive pressures that organise 21st-century schooling. These convergences are a result of

dominant organising policy discourses that have been promoted more generally by politicians, but they come into conflict with other policy ideas from the Gove programme. For instance, school decisions about curriculum design can be much more influenced by discourses such as standards and performativity rather than the policy ambitions of ministers. In this chapter, tensions arise as English teachers navigate a series of reforms that went beyond the English curriculum, and included changes to the examination and grading system. The immediate reaction to solve the latter of these tenets squeezed out the broader, "softer" policy aims and ambitions that accompanied the reform programme, such as ideas around cultural literacy and core knowledge.

Moreover, the supposedly "liberal" elements of the reform (such as promoting rich literary heritage) were squeezed by both external contexts (the need for high attainment outcomes) and material contexts (such as money and resources). The department therefore often moved towards outcomes and path dependency directed by the discourses of standards and performance. Cultural literacy, too, is somewhat underemphasised or even ignored by practitioners at *Lime Tree*.

This chapter begins by reiterating the role of context and its conceptual importance for policy enactment analyses, as well as how participant research fits into this policy trajectory. This analysis will extend the case study information initially provided in *Chapter Two* about the school, and draw on 'thick description' from fieldnotes and interview data to discuss the various contextual features that teachers were working within during their everyday practice. Given its importance, I believe an extended discussion of contexts in *Lime Tree* is significant from a policy methodology viewpoint, as it provides all three empirical chapters with adequate "situatedness" in the field. This information is often only glossed over by normative policy analyses. The rest of the chapter works through particular strategic decisions within the department on policy

networks, exam board selection, curriculum planning and text selection. Finally, I discuss the concept of cultural literacy, given its centrality to the policy discourse.

4.1 A Framework for Context-Based Policy Analysis

This chapter is the first of three that draws on context as a central feature of the enactment process, through descriptions of the interpretative and translation work that practitioners make within their everyday "lived practices". Taking context *seriously* sets policy analysis alongside 'existing commitments, values and forms of experience' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 21). My focus in this chapter is on the range of different contexts that I needed to be aware of during my time in *Lime Tree* and to contemplate the role it played in certain decisions about text and exam board selection. This task requires considering "a set of objective conditions in relation to a set of subjective 'interpretational' dynamics" (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 21). Rather than bracketing off context, actors draw from context, and this is where we must start, not finish.

Government elites, legislators and stakeholders usually create policy initiatives but their enactment is a process of interpretation and negotiation at the different levels of practice (Maguire, Braun, and Ball 2015, 485). Whereas policy-making at a legislative level might be 'characterised by instrumentality and hierarchy', policy enactment entails moments of 'social, cultural and emotional construction and interpretation' (486). Ball's contribution has been to conceptualise policy as a non-linear, interactive, and multidirectional term (Lingard and Sellar 2013, 268). The state is powerful, but this power can become more equivalential across the different contexts (of influence, text production and practice). This ongoing negotiation between institutional actors is about capturing the '*realpolitik* of policy work' (268). These processes are hidden from analyses which aim for breadth,

evaluative criteria and linearity, or fleetingly refer to the surface features of schools to categorise them without delving any deeper—for example, *this school is a converter academy,* or *this school has a higher proportion of special needs children.* Such information can be valuable for determining a snapshot of a school's features, but more importantly, misses how these "indicators" of context play out across different schools.

A clear contribution of Ball et al. 's enactment research is the central prominence it gives to context(s). In their 2012 book, they put together a list of four different contextual dimensions. The first, of these, is *situated contexts* which refer to 'those aspects of context that are historically and locationally linked to the school, such as a school's setting, its history and intake' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 21). Moreover, *professional context* capture 'ethos, teachers' values and commitments' (26). A school's ethos or attitude (built up over time), can 'inflect policy responses in particular ways' (27). Ball et al. also refer to *material contexts* or the physical aspects making up a school: 'buildings', 'budgets', 'staffing levels', information technologies and infrastructure' (29). Here, for instance, a building's layout such as the location of a department can impact on the daily workings in a school and on policy enactments and levels of compliance, given such as material reality either limits or expands who comes into contact with information. Finally, every school has *external contexts* that refer to the 'pressures and expectations generated by wider local and national policy frameworks such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions and legal requirements, as well as the degree and quality of local authority support and relationships with other schools' (36).

The way researchers use the idea of context in their studies matters both in determining whether the analysis is instrumentally designed (where contextual features are variables to be bracketed), or whether there is an attempt at developing a more nuanced appreciation of the way policy

actors in schools work through their contexts in their everyday practices. I have established that it is the latter of these options that informs this thesis. Doing so attempts to rematerialise policy and giving it a 'literal and visceral foundation in terms of facilities, people and money' (Ball 2016a, 11). Above all, it allows me to probe how actions read through context redescribes the prescriptive elements of the English policy, and especially its key goals and aims. This insight might be analysed through picking up on how policy enactment brings about intended and unintended effects which transform the structural contexts through which action takes place, or perhaps by exploring how 'historic circumstances and current practices' can provoke a deliberation about doing things differently (Flyvbjerg 2001, 140).

Context and the Participant Methodology

The earliest question I asked myself regarding fieldwork was whether I would research in one school for twelve months, allowing for space and time to fully integrate myself into the department, or whether I would split across two schools for approximately five months (taking into account the summer break and other school holidays). Ultimately, given the questions I wanted to ask of the new English reform, I felt focussing on one school over a more extended period would be more appropriate. In so doing, I was able to spend some time during 2015 (the first year of the GCSE reform in schools) as well as tracking how the reforms were related at different times of the school year, noting how the ebb and flow of the school calendar created pressure points or allowed space for more interpretive work.

Discussing their project, Ball et al. (2012) decided not to attend to the 'classroom enactments of policy' because such a venture would mean tracing 'out of the specifics of policy through the complexity of classroom events' (14). In their case, they were trying to make sense of the ongoing process of interpretation of multiple policies. Instead, time

and resourcing were devoted to interviewing those 'legally accountable for enacting specific policies that we identified' (14). With English reform, I felt a different type of trajectory was needed to read the goals of the reform via ideational analysis at the *context of influence* (*Chapter Three*), and then to see how these core policy discourses played out in the school. The English reforms target individual classroom teachers and not just school leaders and middle management, although the head(s) of English[35] proved a pivotal figure in the direction that the department took. In fact, the reforms seemed to skip layers of school leaders in charge of teaching and learning—their role focused primarily on a 'strategic level':

> **What role has Stephen [assistant head for teaching and learning] played in the [English] reforms? Has he had any real input in it?**
>
> *Only at a school strategic level at the teaching and learning that might be going along because his understanding of what's required for English is as good as what he is fed... and whilst Annabelle and I have been very good at feeding him the information that means that actually he is quite informed as to what goes on... at the end of the day, he's still got to get to grips with the same kind of thing in geography. And he's also got to get to grips with the generic aspect of teaching and learning that come out of the curriculum reform that the whole staff need to be aware of or need to be addressing or need to be exploring.*
>
> (John, head of English)

As the example above points out, most of the interpretive work about English reform came from the department. In part, this is because reform to a school subject such as English has tenets of *writerly* policy, where the task of how a practitioner approaches teaching a text is mostly contained within planning at the department strategy level and the individual classroom level. Although there are limitations set on

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[35] Throughout the majority of my time at *Lime Tree*, John was the head of English and he had been for a few years. Around June, he left the school and the second in faculty Annabelle took over after being promoted from second in faculty.

what texts teachers can teach, pedagogy allows for interpretive work at the level of the teacher. Furthermore, *Lime Tree* was a large school and was very department-orientated as a result. Teachers mostly spent time in their faculty staff rooms throughout the day, and it was rare to see senior leaders visit the department (except the assistant head who taught a small amount of English and left the school at Christmas). Even if senior leadership wanted to retain some control over subject-specific teaching, the sheer quantity of monitoring that would be required would make this task difficult. As I highlight later in this chapter, however, there were attempts to encourage the English department to standardise their curriculum, though these did not refer to policy discourse about the particular aims and function of English. Instead, they were orientated by managerial concerns such as planning, covering lessons and achieving better attainment results overall.

4.2 A School in its Place

The aim here is to produce a context-rich description of the school (through its various contexts), which can guide the rest of this chapter and the two that follow, by drawing on Ball et al. 's (2012) framework. This analytical work pushes us to see the school beyond just its 'surface features' and to avoid summary, but it also provides a point of reference for understanding how the policy enactments are shaped (and not just explained) by contextual factors. Moreover, the "thick" description serves to anchor context 'in the minutiae, practices, and concrete cases' which provides the study with significance in its immediate meanings— pushing this study to consider the way policy moves in its context (Flyvbjerg 2001, 136).

The School

A description of a school's *situated context* refers to its locale, intake and history. *Lime Tree* is located in a small outer-city, suburban town in Norfolk. As mentioned in *Chapter Two, Lime Tree* is a much larger than

average, mixed-sex, non-denominational, comprehensive institution (school Ofsted report, 2016). The school population is majority ethnic white (school Ofsted report, 2016). Its pupil premium percentage was below the national average. Despite this, though, there was an understanding that many pupils came from working-class trade backgrounds, and this sometimes fed into how teachers understood some of the challenges that this brought in terms of engagement with learning:

> *I've heard a few students mimic their parents in what they say... oh you don't' need your GCSEs... you've got your college sorted... there's a family trade or something. So there tends to be a despondency and a reluctance to engage.*

<div align="right">(Philip, English Teacher)</div>

As Ball et al. (2012) note in schools 'there is much talk of the practical challenges that come with their location and subsequent intake' (24). More specifically, this notion of *our type of child* fed into a wider discussion of the 'Norfolk problem[36]'. Neil noted that parental backing could make a difference to the school's overall makeup and ethos:

> *It's always been talked about as a Norfolk issue... my other school was in quite a rough area in Basildon, and when I talked to a colleague at School B [a high performing selective Norfolk school] he said the difference was very marked that the students at School C were much more motivated much more... and the parents as well... there was just that pressure from home and that expectation from home.*

<div align="right">(Neil, English Teacher)</div>

The ethos and values found within a school play a part in defining a school's understanding of itself. *Lime Tree* had become well-known for

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[36] Tim Wigmore notes a bias in London-centric interventions pursued by New Labour during their time in office to improve educational improvements for the working class. Their strategy had led to 'coastal and rural communities, especially on the East coast' being 'comparatively neglected', although schools that benefitted from a higher middle class intake could override this (2015).

its strong special needs department, and there were instances where staff relayed this:

> *Yes, I would say for this particular school it doesn't know where it fits... it doesn't know despite what it says whether it is academic or pastoral... whereas very much... there's always been a balance of it in every school that I've worked in before that it's been very clear the academia side of it is where the emphasis should lie... I believe we get told it's an academic side but everything in my experience... as a classroom... to keep pupils in your classroom despite being told at the same... to follow procedures to keep them out... they don't tally so I find there's a mixed message.*

(Elizabeth, English teacher)

As Elizabeth makes clear, trying to balance cohorts, expectations and external contexts can lead to lack of clarity over how the school perceives itself or is understood by others. Many factors play into this, including the relationship between pupil cohorts and parental expectations. For instance, I was told about instances where parents were more concerned that their child transitioned to high school with an already formed friendship group from primary school, or was encouraged by the school's perceived strong focus on pastoral and special needs than a discussion about attainment scores. This negotiation overvalues seemed to have occurred during the academy conversion consultation because it is minuted that the proposed MAT was chosen because it best aligned with *Lime Tree'*s ethos of looking out for the 'whole child' (Full Governing Body Minutes, 2016). At the same time, however, *Lime Tree* was under pressure to raise its attainment data and 'requires improvement' Ofsted rating, and much effort had been made to improve data systems in order to achieve this[37].

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[37] For instance, its 2016 Progress 8 (the measure which shows to what extent pupils have progressed from key stage 2 to key stage 4) was below the national average (-0.15), along with about 20% of all secondary schools in the UK. At 49.4 points, however, its Attainment 8 measure (the points pupils accumulate over 8 different subjects), was slightly above both the England average (48.5 points) and county average (49.4 points) (compare-school-comparison, gov.uk).

It is crucial to consider the material context of the schools too, such as budgets, staffing and the physical building. *Lime Tree* had spacious grounds and shared a school field with an infant and primary school opposite. As I will detail later in the thesis, the location of buildings, which were a mixture of old and new development, impacted on how the school was organised between faculties, and this meant teachers came across other departments more frequently than others. Money was a significant theme throughout the year of research, as the school was working to balance the books by reducing staff numbers and cutting the number of courses that it offered. At the time of writing, the school had a budget deficit at the end of 2015-16 of around £500,000, despite the fact it had a £400,000 surplus in 2011-12. Its income had reduced from £7.8 million in 2011-12 to £6.95 million by 2015-16 (an 11.5% reduction) (gov.uk). The school catchment area had undergone a significant population dip in pupil numbers this time, and fewer pupils meant less money[38]. During a 2015 Full Governing Body meeting, the headteacher referred to 2016-17 as a 'difficult year and mark[ing] a period of austerity' (Full Governing Body Minutes, 2016).

Locating the English Department and its Teachers

My research took place almost exclusively in the English department, and I spent the majority of my time either in classrooms in the school building which housed the English department, (although I did visit some other parts of the school during some lunch breaks), notably the maths and the special needs department. For this study, which is focussed on trying to understand how the *context of practice* shapes the

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[38] Data from the relevant School Cluster Group shows that fewer new pupils were around each year in the cluster for four consecutive years since 2011-12 (2011-12; 2012-13; 2013-14; 2014-15), averaging out at a 12% reduction across those four years, with a sharp decline in 2013-14, meaning less cumulative money over a longer period. In the context of the 2016-17 academic year (which is the year I researched) and when the debates around staff reduction were happening, the potential pupil demographic was the lowest number for any age group between the ages of 0-80 years (Norfolk Insight 2016).

enactment of the English reform, it is vital to think about the way these different contexts can provide a tool to better discuss the way policy was enacted.

Beginning with some external contexts, I mentioned in the previous section that the school was under pressure to improve its attainment data. The English department, however, had managed to achieve above-average results compared to the national average for a good pass for several years, including during its first set of GCSE results for the new 2015-17 entry (71%) above the England average (66.1%). In my interviews, many of the teachers felt that other staff members often saw English in the school as a well-resourced department and there was a feeling that there was at least some outside resentment by other departments for being a core subject. This feeling was especially pertinent, taking into account how departments such as Modern Foreign Languages and Music had downsized as a result of the budget deficit already mentioned (Full Governing Body Minutes, 2015). That said, the English department was not immune from cuts and a theme that appeared throughout the research was the department trying to balance its budget by reducing one and a half staff members by the following academic year. The head of English was involved with consulting over the figure and explained this in a department meeting to his colleagues:

> *There is currently a consultation about downsizing the school because there are fewer pupils. John had met the headteacher and was told English would need to lose 1.8 people... apparently, John showed him that actually, it was 1.5 people. John – "so you're going to be asked where else in the school you could teach – drama perhaps – or unless someone decides to just go and get another job".*

> (from fieldnotes, department meeting Dec 2016)

As such, this created anxiety about job security and teachers wanted clarification about how the consultation framework might not fit with a timeframe to find a new job. During my research, the department was

made up of 13 individuals, 11 English teachers and two teaching assistants. From this group, ten were female, and three of the female teachers worked part-time, in order to balance family life or because they were still building up to full-time hours. This dynamic raised several knock-on issues including whether a teacher actually had their own classroom, or instead, had to move between several rooms because of the way they were timetabled. These other commitments or structural features of one's time are also material contexts which directly affect the teaching practice or relationship to policy:

> *"I'm in awe of teachers who put everything into it—emotionally and professionally—but I don't have that energy. I put in less energy now—I still care as much as when I started but I've got a family life and that takes a lot. Planning lessons takes enough time up"*
>
> (from fieldnotes, Hannah, English teacher)

> **So your focus is essentially getting on with the day to day stuff and not thinking in a broader sense?**
>
> *Not because I'm not interested but because I haven't got the time (laughs) and I find it's such a consuming job... obviously if I'm writing a scheme or if I'm planning... and then in terms of going to the spec but in terms of the bigger picture in terms of government changes and where it all comes from I probably know very little because I suppose I just... I rely to a degree on somebody above me saying look this is it now you've got to work with that in order to produce good lessons.*
>
> (Hannah, English teacher)

Here, Hannah brings us to the point that priorities can change in response to other commitments such as family. These commitments and the time-consuming element attached to planning also meant she had not delved too deeply into the broader policy implications. The concept of professional context attempts to capture the 'less tangible variables' than afforded by situated contexts (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 26). The ethos and values held by English teachers may also be

affected by their experiences and understanding of the subject itself and this a unique perspective of the *English* teacher. Bethan Marshall's work (2000) has given us scope for understanding that teachers negotiate their position from different perspectives and many of the teachers in *Lime Tree's* English department provided reasons for considering English teaching as they did:

> *For me it's... I speak from experience... I've got fond memories of English as a subject when I was a student and it struck me that the role of the English... this seems like a massive bias... that the role of the English teacher seems to be a pastoral role... not more of a pastoral role... but equally a pastoral role as it is a subject role... it's when you're dealing with literature it seems that a lot of themes and things get brought up... it's a bit more open it's a bit more free-flowing... so there's a pastoral role to English teaching.*

(Phillip, English teacher)

> *Even though it is an English teacher's bread and butter to consider different interpretations.... that philosophy degree forced me to look at how one could look at a text from a variety of angles as opposed to just in literary terms that's definitely added something I think for me.*

(Annabelle, new head of school)

Whereas Phillip considered English through the lens of a pastoral event and went on in his interview to describe an 'outstanding lesson' as encouraging sufficient curiosity in a child, Annabelle talked about the way English allowed a teacher to 'explore cultural diversity', just as one could in philosophy and ethics or religious education. To some extent, this might be explained by the degrees that teachers took at university. Whilst a great many had taken English literature, some teachers like Annabelle had taken English and Philosophy. Teachers I spoke to felt their previous experiences shaped their understanding of teaching in different ways. Amber, an English teacher at *Lime Tree*, had also done her degree in English literature, but it was her experience of working independently to improve her maths when she was an A-Level student that produced the 'drive to become a teacher' and gave her the

understanding that all children can 'learn the patterns' which allow them to be 'creative off that' (Amber, English teacher).

Along with her previous career in business, this encouraged Amber to conceive of learning from a highly analytical perspective:

> *you know if you want to write a good story you've got to read a lot of good stories to kind of understand what makes a good story... what patterns could we explore... so John will probably say to you that 'oh she's very analytical'... I'm not the kind of archetypal English teacher in that way but I'm always trying to spot... "okay how could I build my student's knowledge of... what gives them the freedom because they don't have to use this all the time"*

> (Amber, English teacher)

As I have tried to sketch out above, some of the most important themes running through my fieldwork concerned how several situated, material, professional and external contexts shape schools, departments and individual school teachers with ideas about teaching English. Categories, such as the perception of a pupil intake, however, become evident in how departments or teachers position themselves in relation to policy objectives. In the next section, I will consider how the department planned for the new English GCSE by drawing on networks and knowledges they felt were relevant. Related to this, I considered the factors on which decisions about exam board and text selection were justified or negotiated, and to the extent that teachers in Lime Tree recontextualised the core concepts of 'knowledge-dispersion' and 'cultural literacy'.

4.3 Enacting English Reform

> *I do question why, when I am on school visits, I see teachers in the first three years of secondary school already using English literature lessons to prepare for GCSE-style questions. Instead of GCSE-style analysis of the text, should those lessons not be used to spread the sheer enjoyment of reading, through introducing pupils to a wide and varied diet of English and world literature? I am sure this would be far better*

> *preparation for their eventual examinations than a premature*
> *obsession with exam technique.*
>
> (Gibb 2016c)

Nick Gibb's remarks during a speech on the importance of storytelling are revealing and succinctly capture all those broader constituent elements that compose the 2013 conservative education reforms: a championing of English as liberal learning through reading and children supposedly benefiting from 'an intellectual hinterland to draw upon for the rest of their lives' (Gibb 2016c). This section deals with trying to understand better how the goals and ideals of the reform, (as characterised in the previous chapter) are shaped by the enactment process and within the specific context of one secondary school English department. This task involves thinking with 'thick data' about very concrete, big decisions made in the early stages of planning such as why a particular exam board was selected, through to why individual GCSE texts become significant, or how poetry was being taught.

There is no doubt that Gibb's comments are formed as a result of a particular expectation he has of English teachers and the subject. In other words, his intervention signals the thinking of those presiding over the development of a policy that itself tries to make sense of teachers by prescribing 'what and who they are in the school and the classroom', or far less tangibly, how the policy *as discourse* 'produces' and 'articulates' teachers and their subject (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 6). However, it fails to ask why teachers have taken these decisions in the first place. This section develops this thesis as a method for narrativising the particular actions and practices of the teachers I met by utilising a phronetic-inspired approach which finds its value in describing the particular/local), as well as acknowledging that policy work "take[s] place on the grounds set by 'bigger' educational discourses" (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 10). Gibb's comment provides the necessary prompt here to ask why decisions are *actually*

taken and what we should make of them. This analysis is less an attempt to prove his observation right or wrong; instead, it shines a spotlight on the *context of practice*, so often ignored by those who imagine policy goals being implemented in the 'best of all possible environments' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012), or reformers that think schools can and *should* just transcend their contexts.

Networks, Exam boards, Text selection

At the very start of my fieldwork, I was interested in finding out about the sort of resources, institutions and networks that the English department utilised in order to help them plan for the reforms. The head of English referred to the fact he had done less tapping into networks than previously in part because there seemed to be 'clarity' over the reform as it was not too 'dissimilar' to the existing situation and because the department was staying with the same exam board (John, head of English). Although Gove (2012g) dismissed The National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) in a parliamentary debate as 'yet another pressure group' consisting of people 'whose moral relativism' had led to 'dumbing down', John referred to it as 'the key organisation for knowing what's going on in English' and had read their publications even though they were also working from the same pool of resources as everyone else involved (John, head of English). Moreover, he referred to the previously 'very strong [regional] network' which had been 'pruned to virtually nothing' by the time of GCSE implementation in 2015:

> You know the first time I went to a number of these meetings it was 30, 40, 50 people from right across this half of Norfolk and there was a similar meeting in Kings Lynn that obviously attracted people from the other side of the county... and it really was a kind of... here's the latest thing from the government... here's what we think it means for you... this is what's happening in primary... and it was a whole series of very useful bits of

information and resources to take away... whereas it's become

much more amateurish for want of a better word actually.

(John, head of English)

Four or five years ago this service was freely available to schools, but budget cuts and the move towards Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs), which often organise their provision internally under the rubric of "collaborative-competition", had left a 'skeleton core' that a school could buy into (John, head of English). This reorganisation of information sharing affected the school, given that they were still going through consultation to become an academy and did not yet belong to a MAT.

In addition to "traditional" sources of information gathering, some teachers referred to going on Twitter in their own time and clicking on 'teacher toolkit or Geoff Barton' (Neil, English teacher). This browsing was sometimes 'semi-accidental' (Neil, English teacher) but three teachers I spoke to were explicit in our conversations about how they had utilised these resources. The new head of English referred to how she drawn on resources in TES and on Twitter in order to research new resources for the texts being taught in the GCSE syllabus. Twitter handles such as @TeamEnglish, which were places 'you join up and throw resources on there... you start discussions, debates' (Annabelle, new head of English)[39]. She did this using the English department's

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[39] It is worth drawing attention to an argument that occurred between Peter Thomas (Chair of NATE) and assistant headteacher Claire Spalding (who was representing followers of @TeamEnglish—a community of English teachers that share and request news and resources). Thomas had questioned 'the quality of some of the resources shared through TeamEnglish' and said that the comments indicated 'deficiencies in the less subject-specialist nature of the non-university PGCE training' (Speck 2018). Here, however, Thomas' point ignores the bigger recalibration of knowledge dissemination that is available through online communities such as TeamEnglish—a Twitter community that Daisy Christodoulou and Joe Kirby also follow, and one that has tweeted support for Tom Bennet's 'affordable' *ResearchED* conferences and Ben Goldacre's *Bad Science*. Andrew Goodwyn has previously written about how 'NATE's membership has declined' and that it needed to engage on platforms such as Facebook or Twitter—and in so doing retain a space for 'good teachers to get together in real space' (2011, 170–171).

Twitter account as she did not have a personal one. This was a shared resource where the department went about following the 'BBC, lots of other English departments in other schools', 'the rest of *Lime Tree* cohort'. Alongside this were 'English professionals, English groups, poetry groups... that kind of thing' (Annabelle, new head of English).

Despite the increasing prominence of new online networks, big departmental decisions leading up to the reform enactment were a piecemeal process of listening to what was being written and said in familiar channels. Most significantly, it was the exam boards that proved most important:

> ***What documents did you get about the GCSE reforms in particular?***
>
> *Practically nothing about GCSE reform.... most of it... until the exam boards put out their draft specs there was nothing apart from what one heard from the press and what one read in the TES... what one listened to Mr Gove saying when one wasn't wanting to slap him and you eventually ended up with a little something... 'oh yeah there's going to be some nineteenth-century'... 'oh it's all going to be exam'... 'oh we're going to have a new grading system'... 'oh okay we can cope with that'... and eventually, it's just keeping your ear to the ground rather than being given anything... when the specs came through I sat and read them thinking... do we change exam boards? You've read one spec you've read them all really because they're so much... it's just fine-tuning and what you look for... a slight difference in weighting of assessment objectives which I don't quite frankly think... what it comes down to at the end of the day: do you like the AQA style of question or do you prefer the Welsh Board style of question?*
>
> (John, head of English)

Initially, the department was going to change to AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance) for literature because by then text selection had become a large part of the department discussion and WJEC, the Welsh Board (now part of Eduqas) had initially left off *Jekyll and Hyde* because they thought Ofqual would reject it. During his interview, John recounted the discussion he had with Hugh Lester the head of Welsh Board at a conference he attended:

I'd already decided that we were staying with the Welsh board with language and initially I was going to go with AQA for literature because they had Jekyll and Hyde... in terms of choices it was just better... I bumped into Hugh Lester from the Welsh Board at a conference and he said out of interest who are you going for and I told him and the reasons and he said we've just resubmitted our literature specification that it's been approved with Jekyll and Hyde and we thought it was too short so [I said] if you're putting Jekyll and Hyde back on the list then I'll be staying with you for that as well.

(John, head of English)

It is worth noting that negotiation of curriculum reform occurs long before the final specifications even reach schools, and some themes are taken up through the consultation process too (see Ofqual 2013b). As Bowe et al. (1992) have discussed, it is imperative to consider how 'different sites of text production are in competition for control of the policy' (21) and in the case of English reform although the government set out the vision, exam boards in negotiation with Ofqual are charged with developing the GCSE curriculum.

The Welsh board had initially left off Jekyll and Hyde because they thought it would be rejected based on its length[40]. The debate around what texts should be selected erupted publicly in 2014 when Michael Gove supposedly intervened in the debate about the centrality of British literature in the GCSE syllabus (Kennedy 2014). Paul Dodd, the head of GCSE and A-Level reform with OCR had said Gove 'had a particular dislike for *Of Mice and Men*' (Dodd quoted in BBC 2014). What is interesting here is not really whether Gove has a bias against American literature, but more about the way politicians (*context of influence*) and outside stakeholders such as exam boards which form the *context of policy text production* (Bowe, Ball, and Gold 1992), interact during a critical time such as developing GCSE specifications.

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[40] It is beyond the scope of this thesis and its methodology, but it would be worth trying to understand how the rhetorical work of Gove et al (or other policy discourses) affected the Welsh Board decision, or interfered with the independence of Ofqual decision-making.

Indeed, encouraging schools to widen their curriculum was a key rationale given the reforms. Take Gove and Gibb's various complaints that 190,000 pupils of 280,000 answered questions on *Of Mice and Men* in AQA GCSE, and in drama, how only one candidate out of 18,000 studied for a 'pre-twentieth-century play' (Gove 2013d; Gibb 2012). Gibb has insisted that these English reforms have unleashed a 'rich and rewarding span of literature old and new' (Gibb 2016f). Thus, from September 2015, children would have the opportunity 'to read George Orwell and Jane Austen, Kazuo Ishiguro and Charlotte Bronte' in order to develop their love of reading (Gibb 2016c). In practice, however, of the 93 texts offered by the four exam boards (and ratified by Ofqual), only nine are unique and do not appear in another exam board's syllabus[41] (2014b). For instance, all exam boards other than WJEC had included *Jekyll and Hyde*. By the time the exam board resubmitted, this text had also been included, and in the case of *Lime Tree*, this was *the* primary decision to stay with their previous exam board for English literature.

In the end, *Lime Tree* chose two books from the Welsh Board list: *Jekyll and Hyde* and *The War of the Worlds*. This number found a balance between the limited planning resources and offering choice. Both books also allowed for consideration of gender splits, as well as academic ability and anticipated interest:

> *We like Jekyll and Hyde thinking about the boy/girl split as well we thought that'll enthuse the boys but it is incredibly difficult language but also it's short... and I know that sounds like... to choose a book... but it's shorter so with my voc ed (vocational)... even though we were told to do War of the Worlds with the lower ability I felt they would be so switched off because I read it and I personally don't like [it]...*

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[41] Perhaps not entirely unfairly, Gove was right to point to the 'culture of competitive dumbing down' exercised by exam boards trying to win over schools, although this only deals with one level of the problem, and there are plenty of other reasons (outlined below) why schools converge on a particular text within the current performance-driven system, whether there is more than one exam board or not, and all of which is perfectly intelligible when it is considered within *the social logics of outcome-based evaluation* (Gove 2012d).

it's very laborious it seems to almost to me to say the same thing every chapter... they're just never going to get to the end of it so.

(Elizabeth, English teacher)

Text selection was interpreted through a very material lens. John noted how concrete material problems, such as budgets offset the reform ambition to incorporate more texts.

I stand there and look in the cupboard and think well okay... the unit of work that's got Inspector Calls in... we could be teaching History Boys... Blood Brothers... Orange is not the Only Fruit... I'm the King of the Castle... Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time... as a play text... A Women in Black... as a play text... nine, ten choices and suddenly you look at it and you think well... I've got a set of Blood Brothers... I've got a set of Taste of Honey that's there as well... I've got 97,000 copies of Inspector Calls that's what we'll do.

(John, Head of English)

Decisions about text selection were balanced between personal ethos and budgetary concerns. During one discussion, the head of English mentioned that Neil thought his top set would enjoy Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, and although there was one set in the cupboard, he would still have found money to buy a set for him because having this choice 'was actually quite important' (John, head of English). Neil mentioned that the ethos in the department often allowed for more freedom in teaching texts at both KS3 and 4:

My two other school I'd say the planning was dominated much more by... things were set in stone a little bit more... either the department had got a particular vision about how it was all going to work out so quite a high degree of control over what was going to be taught and there was perhaps quite a cohesive curriculum and I reckon here possibly because it's a department or a slightly more democratically-minded department, or maybe I've just been here longer but I'd say there hasn't been that overall eye on a curriculum and things are put together a little bit more piecemeal.

(Neil, English teacher)

Although several teachers said they enjoyed teaching different texts, there had been pressure from some within the English department and line management to use the new GCSE reform as an opportunity to standardise the curriculum:

> *There was a core of people including my line manager who wanted one text... until I pointed out that that would be the text that I wanted and in all three cases that was texts that nobody else had ever taught... and so they backed down on that point that obviously it would be my choice... so yeah we went for Jekyll and Hyde and War of the Worlds and we rejected A Christmas Carol, Silas Marner and Pride and Prejudice... and we went Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet and having decided on that, but I went with Henry V so immediately after that I've broken away from it anyway.*

> (John, Head of English, June 2015)

Even here, the head of English felt confident enough to break away from the choices that had decided on as a department. The management argument for utilising the reforms to standardise the curriculum seemed to play out on real issues such as resourcing or having to cover lessons[42] rather than reference to policy text or the reference to a broader, ethos-driven direction for the department (even though it was imbued with managerialist undertones). Instead, senior leaders and some teachers in the department felt systems needed to be better streamlined because 'you'd have like five people in separate rooms creating the same resource and so we realised that's a ridiculous waste of time' (Emma, English teacher). Thus, there had been pressure to centralise the schemes of work:

> *John's philosophy at the time was teachers go to the cupboards and teach any text they see fit for the student... which made a couple of things very difficult it meant that when we were asked once a half term to input data into SIMS to level students... that... it meant that one year 7 class might have been reading Roald Dahl and another year 7 class might have been writing poetry so in terms of a level a 5A in this and a 5A in this... there's no opportunity for standardisation or*

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[42] John was absent for several weeks at the end of the 2015-16 term and Henry V had to be covered by teachers who were not familiar with its content.

(Phillip, English teacher and literacy co-ordinator)

Here Philip evokes an efficiency-based call to create cleaner, streamlined data across components but it was couched in morals terms too in providing: 'equity in the student experience in terms of marking and the data that's input' (Phillip, English teacher). Here, it is possible to think back to my literature review chapter and how actors negotiate between orders of worth in their practice. The equation goes that equity (as fairness and not equality) is achievable through technical means. Standardising knowledge is a result of negotiating the combination of external pressures, pragmatism and desire to ensure pupils do well. To some extent, it borrows from the rationale and language of Hayekian procedural fairness, delivered by delivery systems that prompt standardised knowledge-dispersion, and favoured by Gove in policies such as pupil premium or even in cultural literacy (Jones 2013, 333)

External contexts such as pressure to increase exam grades, or to prepare children in the new curriculum before GCSE had led many schools in the Norfolk network to rework their KS3 curriculum too. When I asked Elizabeth about the opportunities that reform might allow for developing greater freedom over text choice, she noted that at Norfolk Schools network meeting she attended, there was a general move towards making the KS3 curriculum link up with the changes to GCSE content and assessment:

> *You can't have more freedom... no, in fact, our second in department... they'd removed some texts to fit in because this exam is so many different pockets to it we need like more non-fiction stuff because of the language and the comparison. But then the novels were being removed... we had a massive debate about it as a department and realised actually... I went on a course and we [were the] only school in Norfolk that seems to have done that. Everybody else is teaching in year 8 Treasure*

Island to link it to the nineteenth century and at the same time trying to do a lot of language stuff.

(Elizabeth, English teacher)

This meeting provided a chance for the department in *Lime Tree* to develop a better understanding of where they were in line with other schools. They had been 'shocked' that *Lime Tree* had not put *Mice and Men* at the start of year 9 and then built up to make the year 'progressively harder', whilst at the same time 'testing more rigorously' (Elizabeth, English teacher). Elizabeth had raised some doubts about whether this approach would 'suit our style of pupil'. A lot of the schools seemed to be using examination material that AQA had provided them for 'years 7, 8 and 9 that was in line with what the expectation was at GCSE' and this had informed their departmental strategy (Elizabeth, English teacher). Elizabeth left this meeting with the impression that the department was doing 'some of the right things', but that other schools 'were doing them a lot earlier' (Elizabeth, English teacher).

Negotiations over how a department approaches the commitment of curriculum development is an ongoing struggle and can be shaped significantly by the cumulative contexts within the school and its position to other schools. Towards the end of my time researching at the school, I interviewed the new head of year, and she set out the direction for the coming year:

> *My intention is to lead us to just teach the same text in years 10 and 11... for the Shakespeare... the modern play... for the pre 19th century because of issues like setting where I couldn't any into Neil's top set or out of Neil's top set because they've done Pride and Prejudice and no other student has... and from a revision point of view... from a parents' evening point of view... not the sit down and greet but the one where I have to stand there and talk to all the parents year 11... having to cover loads of different texts etc. and we can pool our resources and produce some fantastic things even if not every teacher enjoys that set text at least for the first couple of years... we all know*

where we stand we can help each other out with the text… we can help the students out… and it brings in the consistency which I feel is lacking.

(Annabelle, new Head of English, July 2017)

Part of leadership is evaluating where things have worked and where others have not, and there might be a touch of "stamping authority" in this extract given how soon Annabelle had just got the job. However, more pressingly and understandably, she cites very real, everyday concerns for standardising the GCSE curriculum, such as being able to teach a text if a teacher is absent, or coordinating setting up whole year revision sessions, or the pressure to develop resources, or communicating to parents. Text choices were not developed within a philosophic ethos about the function and purpose of the subject; rather decisions were being organised within a pragmatism to provide the best opportunity for children at *Lime Tree* to succeed, even if it went against the intuition of many teachers' professional values.

Cultural Literacy: Policy discourse, entrepreneurs, and the route to path-dependency

One of the key rationales for the changes to the English reforms has been the Conservative's drive to develop the concept of cultural literacy in the reforms. This debate has been framed within the current "knowledge/skills debate" as explicated in *Chapter Three*. I characterised it as *the social logics of knowledge-dispersion*, a construct that ties together a number of discursive and rhetorical claims about knowledge acquisition as a form of social justice and rationalised in pedagogy terms by the intervention and privileging of cognitive behavioural psychology. *Chapter Five* deals with the notion of cultural literacy in the classroom, but here I want to consider the presence of the more strategic, school-wide policy discourse.

Throughout my fieldwork, I never got a real sense that teachers were captivated by the broader policy context of the educational debate around cultural literacy, and only a couple were familiar with Hirsch's name when I asked them. This contrasted to another school I had worked in a couple of years prior to undertaking my research, which had been very influenced by the debates in the reforms, and conversations about pedagogy, knowledge and cultural literacy had been sequenced into the school's professional development, broader ethos and approaches to teaching curriculum, albeit at KS3[43]. This school was part of the Inspiration Trust quoted in the *Sunday Times* article, and along with *Policy Exchange* had hosted E. D. Hirsch during a visit to the UK.

In *Chapter Three*, I drew attention to *The Times* article which reported how a significant network of free schools and MATs who had adopted the government's knowledge-based teaching agenda, were taking part in the *Poetry by Heart* competition. This article had been picked up by the headteacher of *Lime Tree* who sent it to three of the school's leadership members, the head of English and second in faculty with a brief recommendation that this would be a 'great opportunity' to let each year group learn ten poems each. The note also mentioned the good local link it had with *Cromer Academy* (a school in the *Inspiration Trust* and situated by the Norfolk coast). I was not privy to information about why the head thought this was potentially a 'great opportunity'—perhaps he thought about the chance to link up with a local school, or maybe this was being framed in more competitive terms. I followed this policy over the next few months to see how it developed by following

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[43] I was working the first year at a new free school and this had only taken on a year 7 cohort and sixth form students. This school promoted a rather complex picture of student-centred learning strategies, no sets (driven by an audit of the research according to the principal), mastery levels, Latin, and Carol Dweck's "Growth Mindset", as well as Hirsch's ideas about cultural literacy.

emails sent by the English department and noting any resulting artefacts.

This newspaper article was handed to me in May by Annabelle whilst I was supporting her in class, and she had made a cursory remark to me that 'learning off by heart doesn't get to the meaning of a poem' (fieldnotes, Annabelle). However, when I tracked back through the emails that had accumulated over the academic year, correspondence about the competition *Poetry by Heart* had already been sent out in March, before the headteacher circulated this article. Nothing further seemed to appear during my time at the school. I asked Annabelle about the article and the competition four months down the line:

> **And also just thinking... with the head sent something about learning poetry off by heart... that was something coming from the very very top... will that be done? Is that something that you're looking at?**
>
> *Yep. So I met with some year 8s and we practised and learned how to memorise a sonnet... but unfortunately by the time that had been sent through the deadline had gone... so next year I would quite like to take them to that competition.*
>
> **So this is going to be based on a competition... it will be a select few who want to learn a poem rather than...**
>
> *Yeah and not enforcing it. Not the anthology poems other ones and I was thinking key stage 3 not key stage 4... they would see that as a waste of their time... they've got 18 poems that they've got to learn as best as they can... not so they can call them out by heart but yeah that would be a distraction to them I think.*

<div align="center">(Annabelle, new Head of English)</div>

In this March email, Annabelle had asked English teachers to show their English sets a PowerPoint presentation which offered details for those in years 7-13 a chance to read out a Shakespearean Sonnet and a presentation for KS3 and 4. The prompt by the headteacher to adopt another ten poems per year group had not been taken up, and instead "had been dealt with" when it became part of the earlier attempt to enter the competition. In her eyes, the department had already engaged

with the competition before realising that the deadline had passed and that this was something transactional, rather than connecting department culture to the wider policy discourse. The fact she replies that *Poetry by Heart* is potentially distracting for those focussing on their GCSE exams and it is not a mandatory activity is itself telling.

Interestingly, some of the email correspondence for *Poetry by Heart* pointed to an understanding of learning poetry that was not set in the fixed canons. When a teacher responded that both the PowerPoint presentations that they were meant to show to their English sets were the same, Annabelle responded by telling teachers 'to play a performance poem to your KS4/5 classes if that is more inspiring', before adding a link to a 2013 slam poetry performance by Ronak Patani (Annabelle, new head of English). This dialectic between folk-orientated poetry and the English canon remained ambiguous in teaching thought and practice during my time at *Lime Tree*. Teachers sometimes introduced their lessons with spoken poetry from YouTube: 'I want to show you a woman can perform serious poetry' (Annabelle, new head of English). I witnessed several teachers drawing on slam poetry in their lessons, often holding these up in the same lesson as a Blake's *London* or Browning's *Sonnet 43*.

Embedding "softer" policy ambitions is a difficult task. Hirschian cultural literacy is one of several competing ideas I have seen attempted in schools, albeit well-supported by key policy-makers and politicians. For instance, within a few weeks of being at the school, I asked the staff about the "building learning power" training that had been pursued between 2013-14 when I was employed as a learning support assistant. This initiative was something the deputy head for teaching and learning had utilised during morning briefings and INSET days to introduce staff to the work of academics in educational research such as John Hattie and Guy Claxton. Outside speakers had been brought in. Optional

evening sessions were set up for staff to attend to think about what "building learning power" meant for their own classroom practice:

> *I ask about what happened to 'building learning power' (Guy Claxton), something that was taken up enthusiastically by the deputy head for teaching and learning when I was at the school.*
>
> *John: 'X left... and because the headteacher doesn't like it it's not been pushed at all... that's it... no longer here'.*
>
> *Hannah: 'Actually I saw X (old deputy head) on Saturday and she was saying that the trouble is with all the 'building learning power' stuff that we would end up with worse grades for a few years whilst we built up that culture. Our pupils just are not particularly independent and that takes time when we don't have the time... we can't afford bad grades. We're probably doing them harm with all this spoon-feeding because they'll struggle in the exam'.*

> (fieldnotes, staff room conversation)

"Building learning power" is itself an interesting example, not least because its entry into *Lime Tree* was the result of one policy enthusiast (the deputy head) and a consultant who had delivered INSET training to staff. Its pedagogic style was also very much opposed to "spoon feeding", a term many teachers at *Lime Tree* used to characterise the practice of just giving pupils the right answer. Its website refers to the importance of teaching 'lifelong learning' and not just exams; its buzzwords have the cadence of progressive pedagogy: children need to be 'tenacious and resourceful, imaginative and logical, self-disciplined and self-aware, collaborative and inquisitive' (Building Learning Power 2018; Powell 2016). Claxton himself provided the BERA (British Educational Research Association) keynote address in 2006 (Claxton 2006). During this speech, he spoke about finding a way of making 'more intellectually coherent' learning approaches that could expand children's learning, which had been given a start by the 'hints and tips' culture of mind maps, multiple intelligences, brain gym (all the things Gibb has mocked in his speeches as schools minister) (2).

Had the deputy head still been at the school, I would have been intrigued to find out why "building learning power" was being pursued by the school, and whether it was possible to frame this within a particular domain of professional values, or other contexts, and to ask about the extent that this grated against current policy thinking. Her absence on my return to the school and that of the "building learning power", however, allowed for another series of points to be considered. From the conversation I have drawn on, it became clear that the policy was tied up with one leadership member who had moved on to another school, and so with it had the policy initiative. Ball et al. refer to the importance of policy entrepreneurs for establishing new ideas in schools. They usually invest themselves and are actively identified 'with policy ideas and their enactment' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 53). The work on "building learning power" was itself an attempt to bring together disparate parts of schooling: CPD sessions, teaching and learning strategies, its prospective functionality for different subjects. As Ball et al. note, however, this is a sophisticated form of policy enactment that involves 'creativity (within limits), energy and commitment (as available)' (54).

Putting aside its pedagogic principles, the second point that can be made from this staff room exchange is the admission that embedding "softer" ideas from research can be a difficult game to play in a highly pressurised environment of standards, performance and compliance. Many of my conversations with staff members referred to the bind they found themselves in between wanting to develop more resilience[44] but also feeling pressured to get children through their exams. In this particular conversation, as with many others that I had over the year, the backdrop was organised by assessment and revision strategies. What drives this most prominently is the external contexts on schools

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[44] This word was mentioned a lot and perhaps this is a fragment of what remains from the "building learning power".

to not take risks, and this points to why any major changes to existing schooling practices are often hard to maintain. David Didau, reflecting on Ben Goldacre's call for a new research-informed profession notes that there is a difficulty in developing a new "school culture":

> *We've become used to enacting top down policy and being rewarded for compliance. How many heads would be happy for their staff to run randomised trials on their school's behaviour policy? What would happen if something went wrong? And, more crucially, what would happen if you found it was causing more harm than good? Would this finding be welcomed? Currently, being seen as 'challenging' is not a good thing. We know that, unless we want our cards marked, we're supposed to keep our heads down and do what we're told.*

<div align="right">(Didau 2013)</div>

In many ways, the success of Hirschian cultural literacy rests with policy entrepreneurs such as Daisy Christodoulou, Joe Kirby and Katherine Birbalsingh, who have successfully embedded their ideas in some school networks. These often include free schools or academies that have devoted serious time to make sure that this policy frame is embedded in curriculum design and assessment. I discussed with John my time working in a new free school where we had built-in new policy ideas from the bottom up. He responded that it would be difficult to replicate this in *Lime Tree*:

> *because we've got a model nobody is prepared to go let's start from a blank sheet of paper what should we do... because actually you can't because that model which you want to replace you've got to slot the top end into your new model until such a time where your new model goes all the way through.*

<div align="right">(John, head of English)</div>

This is not to downplay my discussion of policy actors in *Chapter Three*, because these new networks are doing much to shape policy through the dissemination of a much more ambitious agenda on social media. That said, for already-established schools, often more concerned by standards and performativity discourses, policy initiatives that might spark a wider debate about knowledge and cultural literacy are

bracketed: they become transactional, neoliberalised (ten poems!), and fail to recontextualise broader components of schooling such as understanding the text and curriculum planning.

From all this, we can see how new policy ideas can hit a dead end as a result of time constraints, material budgetary concerns, or because a schoolwide ethos is contingent on key policy actors who might not remain at the school indefinitely. This example shows a certain fragility to policy discourses such as "cultural literacy"—often they are ignored or remain silent in a busy environment. Worse, they can become neoliberalised managerialised (and therefore ossified) and emptied of their substantive content: they are exercises in demonstrating the school or staff members are "doing something" rather than nothing. It also highlights Ball et al. 's observation that policy 'always seems to be not quite finished, or about to be changed' (2012, 54). In the case of 'softer' policy directives such as "learning power" or "cultural literacy", this makes it a difficult task indeed. Where a policy actor tries this task, they must work in a space defined by 'a complex interplay between discourses and ground-level practices, conflicting choices and pressures, between "political" (standards/learning) and the "technical" {coping at the chalk face}, and indeed the metamorphosis of flexi-actors, criss-crossing sites, scales an spaces' (Lendavi and Stubbs, 2006 quoted in Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 54).

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored how the GCSE English reforms have been recontextualised concerning many department decisions such as curriculum design and exam board selection. I have started to answer my second research question that asks how teachers go about interpreting the reform goals. Throughout this process there was evidence of tension between, on the one hand, wanting to adopt a broad, liberal curriculum, and on the other, the strictures imposed by policy discourses that have driven teachers at *Lime Tree* to teach fewer

texts than before the reforms were introduced. These discourses are powerful organisers of behaviour. John, for instance, described himself as a Tory, had sympathy for the idea that grade inflation had got out of control, and wanted to offer more texts. He had tried to continue his professional development by attending the *Prince's Teaching Institute*. In the end, however, managerial, material and neoliberal realities narrowed the local policies options open to him and the department. In part this is evidence of twenty years of direct central intervention that has arguably 'de-professionalised teachers, putting them in no position to exercise the new-found freedoms', especially within high-stakes assessment (Gibbons 2017, 115).

Any well-rounded understanding of school policy will need to pay attention to the fact that single policies are never isolated and need to be charted in a 'realistic/holistic manner' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 10). They connect to people, events and context(s) in different and sometimes surprising ways, making the process of policy enactment 'untidy' (Ball, Pol, and Švaříček 2011). However, interpretation still takes place within larger, core discourses such as standards work and performance. External contexts can be negotiated, but this does necessitate an understanding that policy work is still often 'reactive' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 10). The relevant external contexts here for thinking about the concerns of this chapter (exam board selection, curriculum development and texts) are those developed in relation to the performativity agenda. Schools feel compelled to do the best for their pupils by trying to help them attain the highest grades possible. They negotiate this within their professional capacity, whole-school strategy, departmental setup and the broader external forces. It is on this plane that the drive towards standardisation of curriculum, text and resources becomes a response to the larger realities that teachers are mindful of league tables, funding concerns and working in line with other schools.

Pertinently, a *context of text production* can exist in the *context of practice* too, not just at the *context of influence* (Ball refers to here to 'spaces within spaces' (2009b)). Even actors working within institutional spaces can de-contextualise policy, and remove it from 'on the ground' concerns, especially when their priorities are driven by the urgent and not necessarily the important (such as the performativity agenda). One teacher noted that a senior leadership member had bullishly asked what the English department's strategy for prospective pass grades should be coming off the back of a good set of results before the new GCSE in 2014:

> *It's like in briefing on Monday, you've got X [senior leadership member] asking what our grades should be after last year's 60%... whether it should. be 70% this year, but they've not appreciated that we're teaching a new curriculum here".*

> (fieldnotes, Hannah, English teacher)

As noted in *Chapter Two*, Ball et al. talk about *readerly* and *writerly* texts to describe the different levels of agency open to teachers to act creatively. What I saw throughout my time at *Lime Tree* were different degrees of "reactiveness" to a multitude of statutory policy demands that entered alongside the English specific components, as a result of time pressures. Gove has wondered whether the 'speed' with which he has hoisted policy directive on schools, has made it seem like he has 'implicitly or explicitly seeking to criticise teachers' (2013e). However, in terms of enactment, the number of demands can have greater implications at ground level, in skewing practitioners' ability to develop a comprehensive framework for enacting policy ideals, which we see play out in this chapter. The chapter also pointed out that "softer" policy initiatives (such as cultural literacy) can become lost in the noise of everyday institutional workings, especially when they do not have a policy entrepreneur championing it, or a school context where taking risks is compatible in an environment of high stakes grading.

As Elizabeth documented, many schools had reshaped their KS3 curriculums in order to streamline their content so that they would have better prepared their students for exam-style questions and this conversation was reinforced in light of the new reforms. Ultimately, when your measure of success comes down to how good your Progress 8 scores are, being complimented by the Schools' Minister about your vast, wide-ranging, liberal curriculum plays a secondary role. Daniel Willingham has already noted that in the US, schools and teachers (negotiating the No Child Left Behind Act, that had introduced regular mandatory testing), were more concerned about making sure they covered all the factual knowledge at the expense of thinking hard about their pedagogy (Willingham 2012).

Not unfairly perhaps, the current minister for schools would despair that this school was planning on streamlining its KS3 and KS4 curriculums, and he might even argue that such an act is itself a soft form of gaming the system. However, given the external contexts the school faces, such as pressures on resourcing, concerns about the school Ofsted, this has played a part in the way teachers have chosen to embed this new reform. It is here that we might remind ourselves that the pursuit of the urgent can lead to driving out what is most important about the subject. But arguably, this is about a contradiction at the heart of a government that has an ideological commitment to shaping school practices by utilising the twin peaks of cultural conservatism and neoliberalism. By studying this policy trajectory carefully, with attention to practices, context and "thought" this becomes apparent.

The next chapter moves from more significant department-led, strategic decisions to consider another set of observations about curriculum, assessment and pedagogy often absent from normative policy analyses: the workings inside the classroom.

Chapter Five

Policy in the 'Black Box' of the English Classroom

In the previous chapter, I situated researching the 2013 English reforms within a discussion of the context(s) of a single suburban state school in Norfolk. Here, the idea was to "slow down" and reflect on how the English department recontextualised "policy texts" within several competing policy discourses and schooling contexts. The rhetoric of ministers had included ambitions that schools would teach pupils a 'varied diet of English and world literature' (Gibb 2016c), ushering in liberalism with devolved freedom and choice for teachers (Gove 2011c), intelligent accountability, and a reinvigorated evidence-based profession (Gibb 2017a). What the chapter demonstrated, however, was that decisions ranging from curriculum design to enacting new "learning discourses" were navigated within a *context of practice*. Tightening budgets and priorities made by senior leaders resulted in English teachers not being funded for attending external training or given the basic cover needed to watch other colleagues teach. The ambition that reform would lead to a greater variety of texts being taught was side-lined whilst the department worked to enact changes to GCSE English. It is vital in forming my trajectory study to extend the analysis beyond choices made at a department, to consider how classroom practice interacts with policy language and discourse: to see how both become twisted and tangled with one another.

The chapter applies the heuristics of policy enactment theory to study classroom practice across three areas where there have been significant changes to GCSE English literature and language: the teaching of novels, the new poetry anthology and English language teaching. Enactment work across these three areas acknowledges the agency of the teacher in making decisions about pedagogy. It also takes into account how teachers interpret and translate policy texts that have been

created by exam boards or the GCSE specification, within an increasingly competitive and outcome-driven school system. The chapter captures the extent to which teachers share (both intellectually and in practice) the policy ambitions of conservative ministers, drawing on empirical data from my time spent in their classrooms. It also tracks the degree to which the recontextualization of policy text and discourse shapes their practice, or creates convergences and divergences.

Ultimately, the chapter argues that approaches to teaching the new GCSE English content are completed on a complex terrain, where "official" policy demands become entwined with institutional and practitioner logics consisting of situated contexts (such as pupil cohorts or a whole-school strategy), professional contexts (such as teacher values and experiences) and external contexts (such as working within a particular exam system or pressures to improve attainment). Carefully analysing enactment leads us to see where teachers have converged towards or diverged away from policy goals. For both examples of English literature (novels and poetry), the chapter demonstrates how a "context-transcendent" reading of cultural literacy is rejected as teachers work to balance their cohorts and professional understandings of the text, whilst trying to achieve successful outcomes for their pupils. With English language, the "reality" of the classroom setting points to the unavoidable importance of speaking and listening in teaching (despite its absence in the KS3 and 4 programmes of study). Its application at *Lime Tree*, however, is deeply constrained by a GCSE qualification that does not give it formal weight, and because teachers did not draw on a *sustainable pedagogy* to fully to develop it.

5.1 English Reform in the Classroom: Avoiding 'black box' thinking

> *In terms of systems engineering, present policy seems to treat the classroom as a black box. Certain inputs from the outside are fed in or make demands—pupils, teachers, other resources, management rules and requirements, parental*

anxieties, tests with pressures to score highly, and so on. Some outputs follow, hopefully, pupils who are more knowledgeable and competent, better test results, teachers who are more or less satisfied, and more or less exhausted. But what is happening inside? How can anyone be sure that a particular set of new inputs will produce better outputs if we don't at least study what happens inside?

(Black and Wiliam 2010, 81)

It has been two decades since Black and Wiliam published their paper *Inside the Black Box*[45] 2010 [1998]. Their argument sets a standard for researchers wanting to judge the success of classroom interventions. They argue that the uptick in government activity in pushing interventions and strategies to the frontline has not led to effective policy because it left the 'most difficult piece of the standards-raising puzzle to teachers', given that they must work within complex and demanding classroom contexts (Black and Wiliam 2010, 81). The black box is a useful analogy for thinking in terms of positioning oneself against implementation studies and for questioning the dominance of metrics devised by rational choice theorists who try to form benchmarked, context-transcendent policy proposals without considering the fuller processes involved with policy playing out in an institutional setting.

I believe there is mileage in the black box metaphor for conceiving more fully of *education* research with a focus on values, problematisation and phronesis and distinguished from educatio*nal* research, which is instrumentally driven to improve an already-defined educational outcome. This approach opens us to the fabric and messy dynamics present in the classroom setting, as they become significant for understanding policy enactments, and for asking how and why convergences and divergences occur. Attention should be paid to

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[45] The black box metaphor in science studies is hardly a new one given the work that Bruno Latour has done in explaining how the more accepted something becomes, the less capacity we have to engage with the processes that actually make something work (Latour 1999).

underpinnings such as context, praxis, reality, and 'power', in exploring if and how policymakers' ideas become part of a ready-formed classroom dynamic. Policy prompts and provokes as much as it narrows or widens the options available to practitioners; it is also shaped by other "already-present" forces found in the site of the classroom.

Classroom Contexts and Themes

This section focuses on how teachers teach the reforms within the everyday reality of a classroom setting. It does this by introducing some brief contextual information about the three classes that I followed over the academic year. My aim is to give the reader an impression of the way each class was framed by the teachers as filtered through my observations. This acts as a starting reference for further analysis in this chapter. From here, I will focus on three tenets of the GCSE reforms by devoting a subsection to each in this chapter. The analysis of these themes draws on one or more of the classroom contexts throughout.

a) the novel and how teachers taught it within their context(s) and teaching practice.

b) the poetry anthology and how teachers taught within their context(s) and teaching practice.

c) English language teaching and how teachers taught it within their context(s) and teaching practice.

In all, I undertook 117 lesson observations over the academic year (including some non-participant observations in July 2016). As I have explained in *Chapter Two*, my role was that of a participant observer. I engaged in helping pupils in their lesson to access work by answering questions, or by prompting them to engage with the curriculum material. This process meant working through the curriculum material such as the poetry anthology, the taught play, excerpts of fiction and non-fiction that were being used for English language and literature. An

LSA's role can sometimes include scribing for children with special educational needs, and I did this on occasion too. The idea during each lesson was to capture the conversations or any 'critical episodes'[46] that I thought might be significant and worthwhile following up. These episodes were often discussed with teachers after the lesson in order to generate their immediate thoughts on comments pupils made about the lesson content, such as whether they had been apathetic, enthusiastic or misunderstood something. This meant that approximately 60% of my time was spent actively helping the pupils I was working with, whilst for the remaining time, I took a seat at the back of the classroom and took handwritten notes. Doing so allowed me to be 'consciously expose[d]' to reactions from my surroundings whilst not going fully 'native', or simply producing 'action research' (Flyvbjerg 2001, 132).

Class One: "The Anxious Middle"

The first of these classes was a year 11 middle set of 30 children. Previously they had been taught by another teacher who was on maternity leave when I arrived in September. They were now a split-set group with two female teachers (Elizabeth and Hannah) who had acquired several years of teaching experience, including at previous schools. A permanent feature about this class was their defined position as a "middle set" where there was concern about achieving a "good" level GCSE. The class group ranged in ability. Their target grades were set high (with many expected to achieve a level six, or approximately a B grade), but a significant minority were working well below this target. Elizabeth and Hannah, the two class teachers, regularly mentioned their concerns about this group of pupils and set three pupils at *Lime*

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[46] "Critical episodes (sometimes referred to as 'critical events' or 'critical incidents') are not 'things', but as David Tripp remarks, are episodes created by the way 'we look at a situation'—in short, it is a 'value judgement' we make of something (2012, 8). Essentially this entailed looking for reoccurring patterns, or things that were surprising or notable. Importantly, critical episodes must be considered as always something more than just the event itself, which can only be explained by an attempt to explain the deeper structures that produced such an event (9). This was the function of developing analytical memos.

Tree more generally. On the one hand, some conscientious pupils were anxious about their grades, whilst on the other hand, many of the pupils in this set were failing to do their homework or revision. Parents 'didn't seem to be aware of the problem' despite them passing on many messages (Elizabeth, English teacher, field notes).

Class Two: "Confidence Concerns"

I also spent time with a year 10 set four class that had started the GCSE in the second year of its running (2016-2018). This group was small with around 20 pupils, and although they ranged in their academic ability, all were expected to achieve a level 4/5 (the old C grade boundary), which is seen as a "good" pass. Given their starting positions, this was understood as more ambitious than the set three I observed. Throughout the year, I found that many of these pupils were under-confident in their overall ability, but they engaged with English and the subject despite finding it hard at times. This contrasted to the year 11 middle set class which housed pupils that were expected to achieve a good GCSE but were often coasting, or conscientious to the point of anxiety.

Given the class's perceived under-confidence, the teacher chose to engage them with a variety of teaching activities such as reading aloud and getting into the role of characters. Annabelle felt that group reading activities were a 'shared practice' that could be effective for lower groups (Annabelle, new head of English). Pupils would often be asked take on characters from plays and grammar was taught through 'creative writing' tasks (i.e. starting with an adverb). During one of our readings of *An Inspector Calls*, I was invited to read Mr Birling's character. Although she tried to share reading duties around, she noted the dilemma that ineffective readers could hinder the learning process:

> *Annabelle thanked me for reading the text. Said she was going through a 'moral dilemma' about reading because she wants to give everyone a chance but some pupils would find it difficult for reading, or would volunteer and then no one would*

> *understand what they're saying. "Think I'm going to stick with my handful of readers actually".*

<div align="right">(Annabelle, new head of English)</div>

Class Three: "The Voc. Boys"

I spent the year also working with a set of vocational pupils. Vocational pupils spend roughly two days a week during their GCSE studies attending college in mechanics or other trades. This arrangement allows for a consistent timetable given that they are out of school lessons up to two days a week. I have worked closely with several groups of vocational pupils during my previous employment as an LSA. They are usually mixed gender but the two groups from 2015-17 were predominantly boys, and the group that I observed were only boys. These groups ranged in academic ability. Some pupils might be pushing a level 6 (B grade) whilst others were trying to pass or achieve a level 4 (low C grade). This led to problems about where to 'pitch' lessons:

> *It's also different in that there's a range of abilities whereas as usually you have a set you've got... you know top middle bottom whereas with the voc. kids you've got a got a huge range... so more differentiation... so some will produce loads of brilliant work and others that really struggle... they tend to struggle a little bit as well I think because they don't care as much... it's not necessary that they don't care it's kind of we've got our jobs set up we've got our vocation we know what we're doing... we don't even need to get a C.*

<div align="right">(Emma, English Teacher)</div>

Behaviour issues were a continual theme in this class. Much of this was low level, but it made achieving teaching outcomes (especially producing writing), a relatively complicated objective. The boys in this class found satisfaction in messing the teacher around in a way which was reminiscent of Paul Willis's account of the northern lads having a *laff*. Sometimes bad behaviour acted as a release from focused and quiet work:

> *I'm helping somebody on one side of the classroom when all the sudden a bellowing and "drumming" sound starts. Mostly*

fists hitting the table, I think. Perhaps some feet slapping on the ground. It started with one pupil but 15 seconds later the whole class is at it. The teacher threatens to send every single one of them to the behavioural unit and the noise subsides. The clamour has disappeared barely before it started but it's altered the feeling in the classroom and emptied the stuffy atmosphere that thirty minutes of struggling to retrieve quotations brings... as if like a thunderstorm breaking the muggy late summer air.

(fieldnotes, vocational group)

5.2 What Makes a Good Book to Teach?

You come home to find your 17-year-old daughter engrossed in a book. Which would delight you more - if it were Twilight or Middlemarch?

(Gove 2013d)

Unsurprisingly Michael Gove has an answer for his question and used his speech at the 2013 Brighton Conference to set out his reading of cultural literacy (Gove 2013d). In sketching out his position, he quotes Joe Kirby (one of the "reform-minded" teachers mentioned in *Chapter Three*):

'Schemes of work in schools,' he explains, 'are admired based on how relevant and engaging they are as opposed to how rigorous and challenging they are. In principle, there is no trade-off between relevance and rigour; in practice, there is all the difference in the world: the difference between teaching transient vampire books or transcendent Victorian novels.'

(Joe Kirby quoted in Gove 2013d)

Responding to this, Gove says that Kirby is right because: 'Stephenie Meyer cannot hold a flaming pitch torch to George Eliot. There is a Great Tradition of English Literature - a canon of transcendent works - and Breaking Dawn is not part of it.' (Gove 2013d). Kirby is particularly concerned with what he calls 'the enacted curriculum', or 'what actually gets taught in classrooms' (Kirby 2013a). This is an intriguing statement because Kirby does not position the enemy as "consumerist culture". Instead, Kirby's argument is tied to a criticism of Ofsted which has

implicitly (through its inspection criteria) 'dictate[d] the terms of engagement and relevance above all else' and the centrality of "progressive", child-centred teaching methods (Kirby 2013a). Attacking insider-professionals and bureaucrats such as those working at Ofsted is once again linked to a particular legitimate idea of knowledge and knowing things. This argument has gained traction amongst the self-proclaimed "traditionalists" such as Robert Peal (2014b), or those bloggers that are 'watching the watchman[47]' (Didau 2014a). Where this network of "teacher-researchers" sees progress at a policy level, they believe many teachers harbour beliefs that could jeopardise a curriculum built on conservative notions of cultural literacy.

The reference Kirby makes to "enacted curriculum" is revealing. It points to a recognition that policy goes through iterations in the classroom and can be shaped by external contexts such as Ofsted (though this is not a surprising admission given that it comes from a teacher). It is, however, a turn of phrase that fails to do justice to the richness of different perspectives and actions held by teachers (and potentially his own), in as far as it implies a singular enacted curriculum. Kirby's use is better understood as a trope for pejoratively characterising "progressive pedagogies" than a concept that helps one to study how policy is 'mediated and struggled over' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 3). The latter includes asking how teachers try to actually understand what is being demanded of them within the context of everyday noise, and not merely shorthand for policy sabotage. The point of this chapter is to tackle this question drawing on the latter notion of enactment, but mindful that the prior forms the perspective of those shaping policy at the *context of influence*.

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[47] This is a reference to Ofsted. Robert Peal's book *Progressively Worse* which makes the case (and picked up in Tory ministers' speeches), that Ofsted inspection criteria had encouraged teachers to adopt progressive teacher method, whilst squeezing out teacher-talk and knowledge-driven pedagogies (Peal 2014a).

At *Lime Tree*, a major inflexion point from the policy language used by Gove and Kirby was how teachers conceived of the teaching *the text,* including what should be taught and how. Teachers often brought literary or artistic merit back to their understanding of what English offered their classroom teaching:

> *My love of literature and books and other worlds steered me towards English as opposed to RE or philosophy and ethics... because of that fictional element but I think they cross over in the sense that you can explore morals... you can explore cultural diversity through English just as you can in philosophy and ethics or religious education.*

<div align="right">(Annabelle, new head of English)</div>

Annabelle's joint degree in philosophy and English provided her with a broader frame by which to foreground English teaching: 'that philosophy degree forced me to look at how one could look at a text from a variety of angles as opposed to just in literary terms' (Annabelle, new head of English). Neil also gave a version of English teaching that aligned itself to a growth model view of the subject (see Dixon 1975):

> *Something about individual growth something about like... in English I don't know so if you're reading a novel then identify with the character or comparing yourself with the character you're becoming sort of self-aware but you're not sort of clarifying what you're like as a personality but you're starting to clarify what makes you... through your exposure to literature... 'oh I'm not that or oh I'm like him'... so I think maybe it consolidates a person's sense of themselves... and in their writing as well it sort of gives students a chance to voice their opinions.*

<div align="right">(Neil, English teacher)</div>

Neil expanded on this point to talk about the teenage fiction book *A Monster Calls* which was the 'sort of book that should be taught' because it 'told a valuable story' that 'students would relate and engage with or take something away' (Neil, English teacher): Here he offers a liberal (Arnoldian reading) of literature's potential for 'unlocking doors' (Marshall 2000, 91)— a similar view to that espoused by Gove himself

when he talks about *Middlemarch* becoming part of our 'mental furniture' for developing respect for autonomy or 'imaginative sympathy' (Gove 2011c). But whereas Gove wants to explicate 'eternal truths' (Gove 2011c), a growth model approach tends to start from the point of view of the child and work outwards. The book is a 'beneficial friendship'—with the focus on developing oneself rather than following prescription, or imbibing pre-determined ideas (Marshall 2000, 92). This idea of "growth model" in more depth as the chapter develops because of the way it is realised in the classroom context matters.

In their lessons, teachers focused heavily on trying to evoke the pupil's personal responses to the text by utilising characters[48]. Some teachers looked to exploit their pupils' interest in characters further, and this was intertwined with a "child-centred" approach for teaching texts:

> *I like to read bits and then discuss… I think if they're just forced to read in silence for the entire lesson and then not reflect on what they've read then no actual learning happens they need to get to grips with what they've read… so debating… discussing… hot seating characters is you know a bog-standard one but quite effective… for example: 'how did you feel… George when you had to kill Kenny'? You know then they have to connect emotionally to the characters because they're putting themselves in that situation… yeah, group reading… you know some independent reading is necessary but especially for the lower sets group reading it being a shared practice is effective.*

> (Annabelle, new head of English)

Kress et al. have discussed how some classroom teachers utilise character successfully as 'a vehicle' by which 'events and dialogue' emerge—not to be "read off" the text but as something that captures a text's 'actions, relations and processes' (2005, 106). As Louise

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[48] The 2017 Examiners' Report purported that candidates studying Macbeth were often 'focused and empathetic' on the character responses for revenge, even when there was some confusion around the surrounding narrative (WJEC 2017, 5). The exam board considered stronger candidates those that were also able to detail "the audiences' reactions, often emphatically" (5).

Rosenblatt states, although 'personal and social meaningfulness' is not the sole standard for judgement, it should be 'accepted as one standard of judgement' (1964, 161). This seems like a broad and practical balance for teachers taking guidance from the National Curriculum notes, but given the autonomy to use their judgement about the worthiness or substance of a particular text, or to develop pupils' responses. The text itself becomes part of broader attempt to get children 'curious' about literature, where the discussion of themes 'can be free-flowing', (Philip, English teacher), or where it provokes a sense of self-awareness (Neil, English teacher).

Teachers at *Lime Tree* appreciated the canon and its place but not necessarily for the reasons associated with some untapped power of truth that transcendental Victorian novels supposedly hold. In fact, what often mattered for them was that a novel had an appropriate form for its use in an artificial classroom setting. This setting is defined by the ebbs and flows of the academic year, the four-day gaps between picking up the book again and the importance of keeping pupils engaged in order to keep them motivated for two years, as well as something that prompted dialogue. In selecting their GCSE novel, many teachers had opted for *The War of the Worlds* because 'it was the latest of them' and they 'thought the language would be easier especially for the lower sets' (Emma, English teacher). Despite this, many ended up regretting their choice because it had become tedious to teach over the longer timeframe of two years:

> *A lot of them went for War of the Worlds because they realised on picking it up that the language is significantly easier than Jekyll and Hyde although they've almost all realised that teaching it: one, it is significantly longer... two, they haven't been organised enough getting through the text and three it's as boring as hell... despite its essential premise it is tedious... so there are a couple of us who went for Jekyll and Hyde and I went for it because I've got able groups this year... next year I've got bottom set but I'm going to do Jekyll and Hyde with them because actually in terms of plot story it's a damn sight*

more gripping... so it will be interesting next year when I end up with a number of people saying I'd quite like to do Jekyll and Hyde but I haven't got any books... no cos you went for War of the Worlds so you're doing that again.

(John, head of English)

Overall, most of the teachers that I spoke to had become bored of *The War of the Worlds* because it was 'very laborious' and seemed 'to say the same thing every chapter' (Elizabeth, English teacher). Some teachers had underestimated the fact that teaching the novel in the curriculum meant teaching it was a 'longer process' given how frequently one would have to return to it (Hannah, English teachers) and others were concerned that its tedium meant that the pupils were 'just never going to get to the end of it' (Elizabeth, English teacher). Elizabeth went on to say if there had not been planning and resourcing issues, she would have picked *Jane Eyre* for a middle set that had a heavier weighting towards girls. What is important here is not so much that a book such as *Jane Eyre* is usually considered part of the canon but rather that it contains within it features that make a good novel *to teach* for a specific group. It contains an episodic, linear form which can provide an in-built momentum to allow teachers to make progress with the whole book over several months of teaching it. This attribute was perceived to be lacking in *The War of the Worlds* (a modern classic but not suitable to sustain interest in a classroom) because of its repetitive plot:

If I had had a girls group because I know the boys wouldn't probably like it... but if I had a middle set and there perhaps maybe slightly more girls than boys... I like Jane Eyre because it's got a narrative... it's got a very clear... kind of she's going on a journey and this was how women were treated back then and again social context is going to play such an important role.

(Elizabeth, English Teacher)

Motivation is a crucial component of knowledge acquisition. Despite being championed by Gove and Kirby, Daniel Willingham's

interpretation does not necessarily point to any single canonical text to use—it just lays out that subject content should be 'carefully sequenced' with information in specific ways (Willingham 2017, 136). Despite this focus on "careful sequencing", Willingham is clear that motivation for reading is still by and large an emotional response—or in short, what 'excites' and 'motivates' (136). Logical appeals about "eternal truths" in novels will not do much to encourage children to read more—this is often understood by teachers who spend significant time with pupils (142). At *Lime Tree,* there was a concern that despite the strong opinions (and "logical appeals") made by ministers pushing 19th-century literature, some pupils did not even register this in their own learning experience of the novels being taught:

> *I don't know whether it is this school... or whether it's general but I think sometimes we are firefighting with these groups... keeping bottoms on seats... keeping focused... I mean yes... the texts have changed but I don't know if it really affects the kids if they paying attention either way... does Of Mice and Men capture them? They're a little bit interested that Curly's wife is a tart... the fact that Curly is a boxer... that Lenny is not very bright and gets shot... that would be their summary at the end of a lesson... they don't differentiate between say Of Mice and Men and Jekyll and Hyde... as far as they see it it's one great big bunch of stuff that they can't access.*

<div align="right">(Jennifer, LSA)</div>

This observation seems pessimistic but during my time working with dozens of pupils in schools, and throughout the fieldwork, there is no particular distinction made regarding supposedly 'high literature' and other texts; what excited pupils were the story and usually the characters. What is significant in Jennifer's account is that even where there seems to be a general apathy by a class, even those most resistant to reading do remember things and this is usually characters or vivid scenes from the book. During one observation with the vocational class, when they were working through a cut and glue exercise on returning to revision for *An Inspector Calls, Macbeth* and *The War of the Worlds,*

they made several mistakes remembering the sequence of the plot. Their discussion of theme and character, however, provoked a lively disagreement about the virtues (or lack of) of lady Macbeth and the perils of jealousy.

As Victoria Elliot (2014) points out: 'the belief in the intrinsic value of canonical literature often accompanies concerns about a decline in standards or the amount of time which is spent reading' (291). Returning to my *Chapter Three*, this is something Gove has mentioned in previous speeches when he tries to draw on Jonathan Rose's work on the reading habits of the working class: where 'housemaids read Dickens and Conrad and kitchen maids saved up money to attend classical music concerts' (2013a).

The idea that lessons can be organised around context-transcendent notions of cultural literacy, however, does not find the same traction once it is introduced into classroom dynamics. Taking into account teachers' professional context and understanding into account, there was often a little discernible separation between "principle" and "practice". Teachers do pass on the literary heritage, but this is unlikely to be fully encompassing in the time allowed in English alone, and it is often built around what teachers are also comfortable with or have specialised in: 'I've done an English degree. What do I know about the nineteenth-century novel? Bugger all. What can I tell you about medieval literature? Significantly more than most English graduates can' (John, head of English).

Additionally, as custodians of the subject, teachers are aware that the novel they have selected for their class is, in fact, the *teacher's choice,* but this means being sensitive to their pupil's responses to it, especially with 'difficult texts':

> *if you put enough time into it you could find an angle to encourage the curiosity... but sometimes you get a reaction*

from your students when you say you're going study certain
texts it can be a prejudice towards texts.

(Philip, English teacher).

Teachers at *Lime Tree* discussed the purpose of literature within a different frame than sequencing information, by drawing on the language of "personal growth" – (even though this was shorn of some of Dixon's more radical ambitions for democratising language to fit 'children's own social and cultural realities') (Tarpey 2017, 159)). However, for someone like Kirby, what *really* matters for curriculum design is 'sequenced knowledge for cultural capital and enduring memory' (2013b). Therefore, the teacher decides on 'texts', 'content' (plot, character and themes), 'context' and 'concepts' which make up the 'sinae quae non' (sic) of a knowledge unit (Kirby 2013b). He posits his criterion for what text might best serve this purpose:

> *From hundreds of Greek myths, I can't teach them all. How do*
> *I decide which ones to teach? I choose the myths that have*
> *best stood the test of time and endured down the ages. I*
> *choose The Odyssey to read in-depth as the epic with the*
> *highest cultural capital.*

(Kirby 2013b)

What we get from this view, however, is somewhat circular reasoning that these texts are more rigorous for merely being the books they are. Kirby prioritises cultural capital as a criterion (without really offering a criterion because, in reality, it would be difficult to find a consensus about his decision[49]). Teachers at *Lime Tree,* however, include the teaching of context, character, plot and theme with a discussion of knowledge but also a broader conception that literature can also be used to tackle complex personal and social issues. Very often this text

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[49] If "popularity" is a criterion, then Kirby might be surprised by what ends up in the canon – the point of Hirsch's cultural literacy dictionary, of course, is to provide a point of reference so that everyone has 'mastery of the national language—this might even include the medium of the *Horrible Histories* series (Hirsch 2017, 6). And in considering an English culture, though we 'give our allegiance' to what Benedict Anderson called "imagined communities", there is a distinction to be made between 'community-oriented patriotism and militant nationalism' (7).

will include *Jane Eyre* or *Jekyll and Hyde* (as it has always done), but other times it includes Roald Dahl. Whereas Gove and Kirby try to make the canon a central criterion ("principle"), for most teachers at *Lime Tree* it played an essential but auxiliary position in decisions about what makes a text both worthwhile to read and suitable to teach, within the overall programme.

Teachers also pointed to the fact that books needed to fit into the artificial setting of a classroom and schooling system. Kirby recognises this too in his blog post (2013b) where he outlines his Ks3 scheme of work for teaching Dickens. He designs it in such a way as to use an abridged work of *Oliver Twist* and not the black-backed Penguin classic version (in effect he condenses the story from 300+ pages to 20). In so doing, he focuses on '15 key episodic accounts' which can 'offer the most useful knowledge, one for each lesson' (Kirby 2013b). There are undertones to Elizabeth's discussion of *Jane Eyre* as a suitable text to teach, and why *The War of the Worlds* was considered a failure by teachers at *Lime Tree*. Kirby ends up writing as a teacher, but in so doing, ironically, grates against Gove's complaints that in recent times 'worksheets, extracts and mind maps [have] replace[d] whole books, proper sources and compelling conversation' (Gove 2013d). In both principle and practice, then, it is not clear that one can ignore that teachers have to negotiate an "enacted curriculum", concerning their pupil cohorts, material factors such as time constraints, and exam board specifications. It is a reality even pioneering "teacher-researchers" appreciate too.

5.3 Poetry through Experience, Sound and Image

I observed over 20 lessons during my fieldwork, where poetry was the central focus. At an individual level, poetry teaching provided teachers with an opportunity to draw on their understandings of the *text*, *pupil response* and *classroom context*, whilst still working with the set poetry anthology and GCSE examination criteria. The sum of both professional

and external contexts shaped the understanding and application of "poetry as cultural literacy". On the one hand, teachers adopted a "situated cultural literacy" (J. Gordon 2018) and rejected the context-transcendent version espoused by Gibb and Gove. This distinction can be demonstrated succinctly in a discussion I had with Hannah whilst she was planning how to teach 'context' in Wordsworth's *Prelude*:

> *Hannah: [turning around from the computer]. Think I might do something about nature for Wordsworth.*
>
> **Me – good idea. I suppose you have to teach a bit about how it relates to the Romantics and their poetry?**
>
> *Hannah: "the trouble is you need to be able to link all the context to the analysis of the poem in the exam. It doesn't give you much time or opportunity to do it. You could give them a mindmap but then you would end up with them just staring at the front" [she gesticulates a bored child looking to the front of the class].*

<div align="right">(From Fieldnotes, Hannah, December 2016)</div>

Here, the primary concern is with exam technique and avoiding passing on outside knowledge for its own sake. Instead, context would have to be taught in a way so it could be weaved into a discussion of themes, quote or a piece of imagery in order to satisfy the constraint on time for teaching the poetry (two lessons per poem), and to make sure pupils would be able to apply such knowledge in the exam usefully. Ultimately, the context a pupil learns is only as beneficial as its use in being able to produce a tidy, insightful link to the content in the examination. Translated to the classroom, the ideal pupil is also a 'critic' at least in I. A. Richard's sense of Practical Criticism where the focus is on the pupil's interpretation. When it comes to 'unseen poetry' in particular, it is unlikely (and little credit is given) if a pupil can write a biography on Lord Byron because they were lucky enough to have predicted his appearance in the final GCSE examination. Pupils are, however, given credit for demonstrating 'how language, structure and form are used by the writer to create meanings and effects' (whoever

the writer is) (WJEC 2015, 9). This approach prompts personal reflection on the text by every pupil, even if they are not confident about doing so, or would prefer an answer given to them by the teacher. One pedagogic trick is to instil confidence in pupils to engage with the text in creative ways, and to back it up with evidence, which itself requires seeing validity in their responses:

> *They are working through one of the stanzas in the poem Mametz Wood. Pupil: 'this is probably incorrect but...'*
>
> *Teacher – "please never start off by saying this may be incorrect... this is English, it can't be incorrect".*

> (Hannah, notes from fieldwork)

This view is some distance from Gove's view of literature as "eternal truths". Louise Rosenblatt makes the point that we should see a response as less about one reading being as good as any other, but about how judgement about a text is a personal one, where prior experiences, feelings and ideas usually emerge first (1978, 141). The teacher's comments were situated within a frame that the pupils must be able to utilise evidence intelligently, but that they should be creative with their responses. This is the level of scope examiners allow when marking the tests, preferring 'personal engagement with the text rather than formulaic answers' (WJEC 2017, 10).

Beyond the government rhetoric on cultural literacy, the final Ofqual guidance only points to one assessment objective in English literature, which might overtly constitute 'knowledge' of the poet or a historical period. AO3 states the candidates need to: 'show understanding of the relationships between texts and the context in which they were written', which makes up between 15-20% of the final grade (DfE 2013d, 6). The exam boards have included this objective and its weighting in their literature spec, and all incorporate the lower end of this figure: Eduqas/WJEC (15%) AQA (15%), Pearson Edexcel (16%), OCR (15%). It is not surprising then, given that 85% of assessment objectives are

driven by a response to text and commentary on language, form and structure, that the remit of close reading relegates the type of cultural literacy that Gove and Gibb have been expounding. Instead, John Gordon points us to a 'situated cultural literacy' that 'sustains Practical Criticism in a more flexible mode, open to background knowledge and material locating focal texts' by 'activating' the range of background knowledge of pupils (J. Gordon 2018, 31). Activating this form of knowledge is an essential skill given that components in the GCSE also involve unseen literary texts.

Shifting the "mode" of English from explicit knowledge to one that privileges experience and personal response orientates the function of the reader and poem. Louise Rosenblatt refers to the poem as an 'event in time' and 'not an object or an ideal entity', where the reader brings forward past experience and where the encounter 'gives rise to a new experience':

> *This event in time, this intensely complex and evanescent web of ideas, feelings, sensations, attitudes, which he weaves between himself and the text, is the critic's primary subject-matter. No matter how impersonal and objective may seem his critical interests, he must deal with such events, report them, compare them, explain and defend or attack, in short, evaluate, them.*
>
> (L. Rosenblatt 1964, 128)

This 'self-reflection' is something that is maintained in the Eduqas (a brand of the Welsh Exam Board that the school was with) assessment criteria when it says that pupils will be judged on their ability to form a 'critical style and develop an informed personal response' (WJEC 2015, 11). For Rosenblatt, 'the work-as-experienced becomes the object of reflection' where each reader brings a 'specific past life' (1978, 144). Such as view is not given adequate space in the Govean universe of 'eternal truths about human nature' (2011c), or poetry understood through the 'discipline of proper literary criticism' where it is limited to 'knowledge

of the canon' (2012e). This view takes the pupil away from 'the process of their own learning and to the subject of English and the wider culture and what kinds of pedagogy might best draw on this resource' (Anderson 2015, 27). Teachers at *Lime Tree* approach their teaching through a personal response understanding of literature where pupil-centred learning still retains a significant place when it comes to the process of decoding the text. This does not diminish the role of knowledge and informal literary heritage (just as Wordsworth has always had his place in the curriculum); the pedagogical sequencing of teaching factual knowledge, however, is not one that is done from outside the text. In large part, this is because the exams boards do not demand the task be undertaken in such a crude manner.

Most of the poetry classes I observed were with the year 11 set 3 class. In these lessons, there was a focus on getting through the anthology texts and revisiting them in a way to make sure they had developed quality annotations to revise from during the revision period. Often this included working through the poem with a PowerPoint presentation which gradually revealed the teacher's ready-formed annotations, or questions and promoted pupils to respond with their thoughts. Even using this tightly-structured approach to teaching the text, the poem as an object of study was "enlarged" by the way teachers interpreted the exam criterion that the pupils would need to evidence such as "content and key ideas of each poem, and the poets' use of language, structure and form" (WJEC 2015, 9). As a result, I observed many lessons where a discussion of imagery or sound introduced poems. A teacher's approach to introducing an extract from Wordsworth's *Prelude* for the very first time serves to make this point:

> *The teacher shifts to three prepared images she has taken from the poem on the whiteboard and asks pupils to turn to the page in their anthology. On the board is the question: 'what sounds might you recognise in this poem?'*
>
> *Pupil – who's Wordsworth?*

Teacher – He's a famous Romantic poet. So, the Pre – lude or Pree – lude... it's a bit like scone or scone and can be said either way, different ways of saying it. Before we read this I want you to consider these pictures and some sounds you might associate with them.

She reels off a fireplace, Big Ben, ice skating. The pupils struggle with Big Ben...

Teacher – come on you all know what a clock sounds like.

Pupil – "ding."

Teacher – Ding, yes... [laughter]... more of a dong or gong?

(Hannah, notes from fieldwork, set 3)

From the start, the teacher avoids moving straight into a full-blown discussion of Wordsworth and the Romantics, as this was teased out through the connection she ended up making to the theme of "nature" later on[50]. This was done through recognising where the poem is set (rural), and how the poem is set up to show how Wordsworth is drawn by nature and less by mundane everyday living. As the lesson progressed, the teacher returned to these images (Big Ben, in order to introduce the theme of 'time' in the poem extract; the lake, as a representation of child's play). The teacher drew upon the sounds in order to develop a more nourishing reading of the poem simply focusing on themes. This task involved connecting themes and imagery to the language, and without this emphasis, it would have been difficult to ask questions about the changing tone of the poem as it progresses away

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[50] Background knowledge about poets or movements was rarely taught separately from the text (despite the odd computer lesson where pupils did some background reading, or watched a Wilfred Own documentary). Instead it was usually sequenced in such a way that pupils could utilise this to help them develop stronger answers in response to the text, and certainly not privileged over other things such as a pupil's personal response, and which negated an isolated transmission of authors and movements. The 2017 Examiners Report claimed that the best answers were those 'interweaving of relevant contextual detail into discussion', and had a 'strong focus on imagery, language and the effects they create' (WJEC 2017, 12).

from childishness and towards a recognition of fading childhood (a theme which is picked up in Blake too).

Speaking and listening have been relegated across the entire GCSE. For instance, within English language, speaking and listening is conceived as the 'consolidation, practice and discussion of [standard English] language', where pupils work 'to consciously control their speaking and writing' (DfE 2014, 4). Speaking and listening is conceived as a vehicle for better reading and writing comprehension later in a pupil's schooling, and so pupils understand 'linguistic and literary terminology' (DfE 2014, 4). The concept of 'sound' is not talked about or has a very narrow utility, in the Govean worldview of literature because by KS3 and 4, pupils should be focused on the written text.

Despite this omission at the state level, at the *context of text production*, there is some recognition about the importance of sound and poetry. A teacher guide sheet on *The Prelude*, developed by Welsh Board foregrounds the importance of drawing on imagery and language through a reading of the sounds in the poem. Teachers should pay attention to the fact that 'the striking and conscious use of sibilance in 'hiss'd along the polish'd ice' is meant to recreate to sound of blade on ice (Eduqas 2015). It is curious that despite this, the English programme of study at KS3 and 4 makes no mention of the importance of sound in literature, not even building on the more instrumental usage in KS1 and 2, where the word appears dozens of times in the programme of study in reference to phonics instruction. This omission is a missed opportunity, given that once the basics are learnt in phonics, a pupil might develop a richer understanding of how poets use sound creatively.

Although I witnessed poetry taught from "a growth through English" perspective, the assessment pressure, especially regarding the closed book anthology exam question, led the department or develop revision techniques. This is where I felt there was the most considerable tension

between poetry teaching in the classroom, and the external pressures of a high stakes system. After the Christmas break, it was noted that many of the teachers realised that pupils were finding remembering "contextual details" more difficult[51]:

> Neil – *"you see that's really quite a lot for a kid; they have to remember 14 [18] bits of context with each poem".*
>
> John – *"Ah but I've told my class that they need to know six [eight] really well. If one comes up then great that's a bonus... if one of them doesn't then they've got the text in front of them and the poems which link really well can be used".*
>
> Neil – *"That seems much more manageable. So really, we need to work out which six poems link with each other really well... what are the 'super-linkers' almost?".*

<div align="right">(Fieldwork notes, staff room)</div>

In the examination, pupils are unable to bring in their annotated anthologies, which led to some anxiety because many felt remembering 18 instances a problematic task. Following this informal staff room conversation, teachers spent a department meeting developing a theme sheet which consisted of a brainstorming exercise where staff tried to find cross-overs with other poems. Because the exam bases itself on themes and pupils must select a poem which fits this theme, the idea was to develop a system which would allow for more efficient revision for pupils whereby they learnt these key poems more thoroughly than the others. This pressure led to a resource being shared with all teachers via email to be passed on to pupils (see Figure 1.)

The full revision document instructs pupils that they must remember 'by heart at least one quotation for each bullet point', regarding the

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[51] Contextual detail here refers more to the annotations such as themes and identifying language, than to the Govean 'canon', author studies and their influences.

A Poetry Revision Method

Consider prioritising EIGHT poems; revise the others too (including for context), but you can look in more detail at these eight. If a poem other than these eight comes up in the exam, you will at least have that poem in front of you for Part A (15 marks) and can link it to one of these eight for Part B (25 marks).

Here is a suggestion as to how you could pair four poems that have more than one theme:

Themes
Love / Relationships
War / Conflict
Power
Nature / Place
Childhood / Memories / Time
Death / Loss
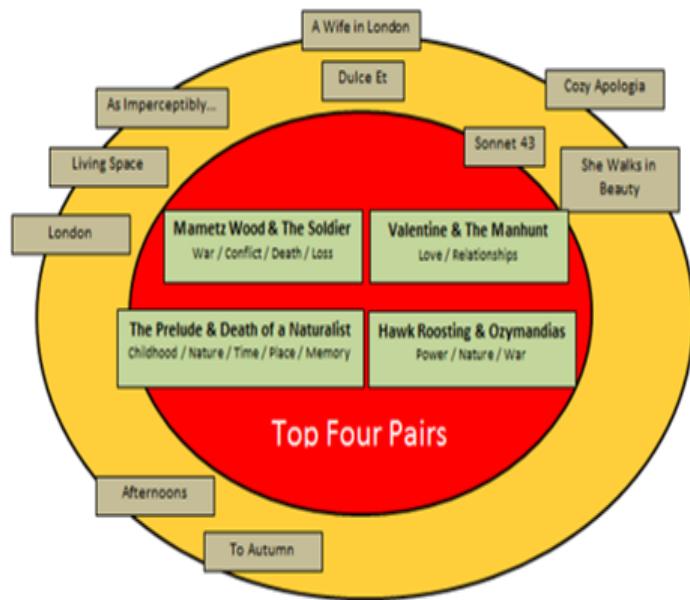
Figure 1. Poetry Revision Sheet. "Finding the super-linkers".

content and structure of poems; how writers create effects and the contexts of the poems and how these may have influenced the ideas in them (revision document). This artefact is particularly revealing because although there had been the odd lesson where pupils were asked to research facts about the poets, this was inextricably tied back to the text during the actual analysis of poems. As the exams got closer, there was a bigger push, especially at department-level) for learning several set quotations and less emphasis on developing an exam technique that encouraged pupils to sharpen their written responses to hit exam criteria.

In *Chapter Three*, I noted that Gove's belief that more robust, standardised exams benefit pupil motivation and are, therefore, a valuable component of the curriculum (Gove 2012e). But high-stakes testing does not necessarily lead to better teacher and pupil motivation. Daniel Willingham (adopted, along with Hirsch, as the American intellectual for promoting knowledge-curriculum) makes the point that the higher the stakes in a test, the less creativity is likely given the teacher focus on helping pupils to pass those exams. Even when we find teachers relating to the text within a broader pedagogical frame in the classroom, the pressure of assessment incentivises behaviours that undermine any real "creative" response to approaching the text. This "gaming" would arguably be worse if poetry at GCSE became fully enthralled to a homogenised notion of culture, where demonstrating standalone knowledge of a poet's life is considered valuable. As Willingham notes, it is 'very difficult to write' exams in a way that 'call[s] for creative responses, yet are psychometrically reliable and valid' (2012).

5.4 Teaching English Language

In this section, I will develop a discussion around GCSE English language teaching at *Lime Tree*. The focus here is on the role and status

of speaking and listening in the classroom which, as Simon Gibbons has noted received 'scant attention' in the most recent reforms, (along with media, multicultural texts and drama) (2017, 123). The Expert Panel in parliament that was set up to consult on the 2013 curriculum changes also made the point that Hirschian Core Knowledge in its current state did not adequately address the progression of oracy skills in English and the wider curriculum (James et al. 2011, 53). Though it has been conspicuously underemphasised in the reform documentation, speaking and listening made up an important part of the lessons that I observed. Both skills are part of the fabric of classroom life and central to the learning process—whether underpinned by statutory examination or not. I use a 'critical event' from the vocational class to explore how the current pedagogical frame of teaching English language and transactional writing, which is often outcome-driven, can restrict opportunities for practitioners to fully take advantage of spoken conversation that arises "naturally" in the English classroom, as a consequence of the topics that teachers choose[52].

The lesson objective of achieving a writing output had made spoken language a redundant component of the exercise. This relegation of spoken language was frequent throughout the lessons I observed, given that speaking and listening had been packaged as a separate non-GCSE English examination. On the one hand, teachers had stopped using some activities such as role-play (Hannah, English teacher); on the other, this absence arguably resulted in less thinking about what to do with the language that arose "naturally" from events and activities in the classroom.

The example I provide observes pupils working on "article writing", which makes up part of component two of the language paper, and one

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[52] With this in mind, it is possible to distinguish between excitement and noise that has arisen in the classroom as a result of a topic/reading being set, as opposed to conversations that have carried on from school field at lunchtime.

of the skill competencies[53] necessary for the GCSE examination. Pupils were given a magazine article about Donald Trump in order to identify how the writer used several language features, such as hyperbole, the rule of three and rhetorical questions to make the article 'lively[54]'. From this example, they were expected to write their own magazine article on a celebrity of their choice, using the language features that they had identified.

Critical Event

> The learning question is provided on the board for pupils: 'can I do article writing?'
>
> For the first 15 minutes, the pupils are given two reviews – one is an interview with the film star Ryan Reynolds and the other looking at the start of the Trump presidency. They work through this as a group with the teacher writing down all the different language features, including techniques such as the rule of three and other linguistic conventions.
>
> This starter then feeds into the second task in the lesson where pupils are supposed to start their own review – as they are practising for the transactional writing component. However, one of the pupils mentions Trump's policy on migration (in reference to the article) and this prompts a conversation about UKIP and immigration.
>
> Learning Support Assistant (LSA): "that man from UKIP is the only one who likes him in the UK".
>
> Pupil: "Ah Farage of UKIP".
>
> This starts a chant from the pupils: "UKIP, UKIP, UKIP".
>
> Pupil: "UKIP them back to where they came from".
>
> For the next fifteen minutes, there is no writing as pupils are in full-blown conversation with the teacher about immigration and immigrants.

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[53] Others within the writing component two unit include biographies, letters and speeches. Such a task makes up 30% of the overall language grade. Pupils do not know which skill competency they will be asked to demonstrate.

[54] In the Eduqas documentation, it is not referred to as a 'lively article', but "article". At *Lime Tree*, however, all article tasks were considered to be "lively article".

> This mostly sounds like pupils parroting views they have come across elsewhere; the teacher and LSA try to buffer this with an alternative perspective. This doesn't really work and the pupils get more riled up.
>
> Pupil: "Yeah but there's no jobs and there's no housing for us – look at everyone at the job centre – you tell them there's loads of jobs about. That's it... I'm looking up how many migrants are here [he gets out his phone]..."eight million... there's eight million here...add another two million for the people we don't know about".
>
> (fieldnotes, vocational set)

My field notes had been littered with observations about the apathy of pupils in the vocational class towards English as a subject. This event was a rare moment, however, when a lively conversation ensued as a response to the text (and the off-the-hand comment made by the LSA). This was not an orderly, planned debate (such a formal structure would have likely failed to engage these pupils), but it did present some potential opportunities for pupils to voice their opinions and reasoning skills. The classroom dynamic was itself a precursor to such an event happening. It would be hard to imagine a well-behaved top-set class launching into an explosive, unplanned discussion lasting for several minutes. Such a thing would be an aberration in relation to the regular classroom rules. During her interview, Elizabeth reflected that behaviour management in the classroom could require some flexibility when it is tied to the learning and assessment process for her vocational classes. There was a feeling that if behaviour management rules were followed to the letter, then most pupils in the vocational group would not survive more than a few minutes in each lesson.

> *If you approach them in the same way as another group, you won't because you'll alienate them so I find that I am more relaxed... I have more rules in place for them which they still break, but actually I think the expectation is different in the way I relate to them.*
>
> (Elizabeth, English Teacher)

The task, however, had allowed for a conversation to begin but there was not a resourceful way available to capture this "spontaneous" material. A pedagogical structure that does not allow for some time to move away from outcomes stifles the ability to engage pupils with a level of sensitivity and spontaneity that can arise quite regularly in a classroom and still be relevant for English.

This adherence to a focus on outputs was a mode of teaching that occurred across classes: a tight structure where teachers tried to use engaging texts, but the exercise and lesson objectives were firmly focused on developing the written capacity[55]. It was possible to see this occurring right across the GCSE programme. Annabelle noted she often used 'lively texts' in order to engage their pupils. In one class she chose a provocative article by Katie Hopkins[56]:

> **Me: "Why did you choose this text?"**
>
> *Annabelle: "because I thought it would engage pupil X (a girl) and a few of the other girls would find it horrible and stereotypical so that would get riled up, and some of the boys would just naturally go along with it and accept some of it.*

<div align="center">(Annabelle, new head of English)</div>

Although teachers appreciated that texts could be useful for engagement, this was a means to an end for identifying language markers. Below is some dialogue of the Katie Hopkins text being taught in the teacher's English class:

> *"Now you might want to punch this person, or it might irritate you but this is a really good example for us to have a look at – it's a lively article with lots of features to pick out... so we're going to go through this, and I'll stop after the first paragraph but I won't keep doing it because it's too controlling if I do".*
> *Pupils highlight rhetorical features such as rhetorical*

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[55] I also noted down that grammar was taught using "creative writing" tasks in order to make more engaging for the pupils. Sometimes images would be put up on the board in order to prompt pupils. The task would be to begin a response with either an adverb or a noun.

[56] Katie Hopkins is an outspoken and controversial columnist and "media personality".

questions, hyperbole, how she builds up controversy and tension (use of short sentences, etc.).

(Conversation with Annabelle, field notes)

The need to develop tangible outcomes for each lesson, and within different stages of a single lesson, is problematic for allowing for natural conversation to flow which might otherwise do if we were to approach English teaching differently, and with a constructive purpose. Within such a mode of thinking, as noted by Frank Hardman, teachers can fall into the 'trap of making question-answer sequences too rigid by asking too many recall-based questions' (Hardman 2011, 43). Whilst developing his "growth model" of English during his Dartmouth conference, John Dixon observed that allowing a pupil voice often brought up 'unsuspected processes of feeling and thought, which class discussion dominated by the teacher's language (we could add the exam board's language here) had obliterated' (Dixon 1975, 111).

Paul Tarpey (2017) has recently attempted to rethink the core tenets of Dixon's "growth model" at a time when politicians such as Gove are in the 'business of promoting particular types of knowledge' as providing 'universal truths about human existence that are easily and equally applicable to all people' (157). The point he makes is that the "growth model" put forward by Dixon would not have enculturation as its brief, but rather guide 'democratic and participatory ways' of using language to foster 'personal voice', innovate and explore with reference to 'children's own social and cultural realities' (159). There is no distinction here between writing and speaking. Children and adults engage critically 'with a range of dialectical processes' to understand how 'dominant discourses and structures have a significant influence on consciousness' (160). Thoughtfully engaging with pupil voice 'can release fuller potentialities in the conversation process' (Dixon 1975, 112)

Although the notion of "growth" appears in the language of many teachers, including those at *Lime Tree*, it does so without the radical

potential of 'proposing competing theoretical bases from which new ways of working might emerge' (Dixon 1975, 161). Whereas a break down in the classroom activity might be deemed a "failure" by policymakers and senior leaders wanting outcome-based lessons, in the critical case study, there was an opportunity to challenge the notion of "fake news" after the pupil used his phone to search the number of immigrants living in Britain. This reference to critical engagement was something noted in *Chapter Three* when I drew attention to the OECD's Andreas Schleicher's comments about how schools should help educate children to work through information on the internet critically. The broader point here is that pupils have a chance to debate and practise their oracy skills, but they are not made aware of how this 'personal' evocation raised by the topic of the text allows them to see how 'personal response' is part of a rhetorical stance of writing. The approach also fails to acknowledge how the English curriculum becomes a key function in the 'development of citizens' who exercise 'a sense of moral and spiritual values' (Kress et al. 2005, 129), or how the English curriculum is something that has the potential to engage students and thereby give it a socially critical purpose' (V. Ellis, Fox, and Street 2009, 4).

When I spoke to the LSA in the classroom, Jennifer, she noted the 'great shame' that vocational pupils would not have the opportunity to practice their speaking and listening because it had been dropped from the exam:

> *I think it's a great shame that they're not doing the speaking a listening... as human being we learn to speak before we write... usually voc. ed groups are very good at speaking... they're not very good at writing... and also they probably have a very good understanding of... the way you know... the world runs they're quite worldly-wise... a lot of them are working alongside parents before they've even left school... so they have an understanding of the world.. possibly more than the academic pupils... so I think it's a great shame that they're not doing speaking and listening because it gives them an opportunity to talk... whereas they don't always find it easy to write.* (Jennifer, Learning Support Assistant)

Although the new curriculum provides some renewed sense of autonomy away from Labour's model lesson plans, the intensification of neoliberal accountability systems still works to organise the pedagogic range available to practitioners. The fact that speaking and listening is only understood to be available to pupils and teachers as a resource to draw on when it is formally examined shows how two decades of central intervention and de-professionalisation, which has been built on a terrain of accountability and high stakes assessment, has curtailed creative responses. Rather than engaging with the professional autonomy in creative and innovative ways, teachers, perhaps unsurprisingly, are more focused on making sure pupils can write efficiently in examined genres at the expense of exploring how the subject allows them to engage with different modes of communication.

This mode of professionalism combines tightly-structured pedagogy, (characterised by recalling particular features of the syllabus), with a data system that requires constant monitoring of assessment in order to build up an idea of which components of the exam pupils are struggling with (see *Chapter Six's* discussion of PiXL). Though conversations emerged in the classroom, having no pedagogic frame by which to accommodate these "spontaneous" moments meant it was difficult for teachers to confidently draw on the conversation that was generated "in the moment", as a result of something unexpected, and beyond this to seize the fuller application that English can provide. We do not have to fully subscribe to John Dixon's perspective from the 1970s to at least recognise that pedagogical models can pressurise and distort our ability to create relationships, as well as close down other potentialities that might arise from placing pupil voice at the centre of the teaching and learning process.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter followed the policy trajectory into the classroom by analysing the participant observational data that I undertook over my year researching at *Lime Tree*. Like *Chapter Four*, this chapter also provides an answer to research question two by addressing how practitioners interpret the reform content in their classrooms. In sum, the logics of state policy (*knowledge-dispersion*, *outcome-based evaluation* and *responsibilisation*) are mediated by practitioners within existing institutional, professional values and concepts. All three become entangled and reworked in the complexity of the classroom context. The result is a type of "pragmatism" that draws together idealistic views of the profession and the subject with a hard-headed need to work within external contexts. Despite politicians such as Gove and Gibb articulating a desire for teachers to be creative storytellers as well as masters of data systems, evidence and the performance system, the harmonious confluence of these two demands is difficult task to achieve. The tensions and contradictions that arise from such a task are the "reality" of enactment work.

What emerges in this chapter is that the logic of *outcome-based evaluation* interacts with other contexts and negotiations that arise as a result of the policy process. The English GCSE examination criteria, for instance, does not allow for the smooth transition between context-transcendent notions of cultural literacy (a curriculum of facts) and a knowledge-led pedagogy (where knowledge is sequenced and delivered or transferred). Instead, teachers, making sense of the criteria, adopted an approach to teaching knowledge that situated it in relation to what was needed for exam answers, and by implication allowed for personal response and pupil knowledge. Studying how the reform principles play out in the classroom provides a broader view of how competing logics interact with one another throughout the policy chain. Tracking

institutional practice also demonstrates how compliance with policy objectives manifest themselves asymmetrically in different parts of the school chain, and across departments. I can point to the comment made by the deputy head who admitted forgetting 'what a difference... a teacher that has rapport with them [pupils] can make to their own self-confidence' (Elizabeth, English teacher). It is much more difficult to forget this when you interact with your class on a day-to-day basis.

Policy analysis (or policy prescription) that conceives of the classroom as a black box of inputs and outputs misses simple things such as this; only qualitative data (that listens and watches) picks it up. Unfortunately, the fact that teaching staff rarely get to see other teachers teach (John's comment in *Chapter Four* about the lack of opportunity to watch other teachers) means that data becomes the default arbiter in judging how well a class seems to be doing, or an intervention seems to be working.

On the contrary, at present, policy implementation is driven by an ever-increasing reliance on input-output metrics, enabled by performance data. We can think about the programme of 'deliverology', which attempts to turn idea/election promise into implementation by using data collection, target setting and trajectories, and the establishment of routines (Barber, Kihn, and Moffit 2011). This model still informs public policy evaluation models; an updated iteration of Barber's Public Value Framework was circulated as recently as March 2019 by HM Treasury (HM Treasury 2019). Schools are encouraged to mirror this methodology through ever-increasing reliance on metrics, and advice from consultancy. This evaluative approach arguably simplifies the evaluative criterion used to judge the success of interventions. Holmes-Roberts characterises this abstraction of classroom practice to outcomes in his paper title: 'if the teaching is good, the data should be good and if there's bad teaching, there is bad data' (2015, 302). This mode of thinking is the conclusion of the *logics of outcome-based*

evaluation. As a result, there is little attention to the tangents policy takes as it plays out in the classroom. Paying more attention to this can give policymakers a better idea about why particular policy goals are "ignored" or reworked by teachers and provides them with a vocabulary for thinking about these issues beyond the premise of "policy saboteur".

There is a place for *educational* research in educational studies, which tries to determine the reliability and validity of interventions in the classroom, and this needs to be a part of an overall discussion for education and professional development. We should, however, interrogate the classroom interventions of the day in order to see whether what is said to work does in fact, work and how it changes or interacts with already-existing processes on the ground. When researchers contribute to the 'evidence-base' of the profession, this should be done without simply 'accepting the assumptions underlying them', or allowing ministers to 'define the field' based on 'inappropriate assumptions' (Whitty 2006). This means *really* assessing research variables in-depth, but it also prompts us to take into account the political processes that are attached to educational interventions, especially when they attempt to mask themselves as politically-atheistic, value-neutral endeavours (Joshua Newman 2016).

Shared Principles

The dozens of documents that I collected and 120,000 words of field notes and interviews presented contradictory pictures about the way teachers had positioned themselves in response to the reforms. In summary, however, it would be possible to say something representative across teaching staff:

a) teachers accept the premise of an *official* National Curriculum and the legitimacy of the texts being taught, though this is mediated within a series of broader educational contexts. This contextual map includes past and current professional values (or

teachers' memory of previous iterations of the curriculum), the external contexts that are presented to them in statutory guidance documents from exam boards, the pupil cohorts they are working with and very material concerns such as budgets.

It was evident in the way teachers spoke about the subject in response to the new reforms that they do not fully subscribe to the policy ideals and goals posited by Gibb and Gove. This was especially true when considering the full range of policy ideals: knowledge-led pedagogy, valuing specific 19th-century texts, transcendent-context versions of cultural literacy, an evidence-based professional working within the remit of the EEF toolkit. This insight is not entirely surprising given that 'teachers do not regard themselves as being in step with current policy, and locate themselves in terms of pedagogies of an earlier period' (Kress et al., 77). What is more enlightening, however, is how the chapter shows divergence from "softer" policy ideals as a result of contexts often ignored in abstracted, evaluative research about interventions.

b) English teachers still consider themselves working within a student-centred pedagogic frame. This frame has elements of John Dixon's growth model of teaching, but it has been ossified as a result of decades of reliance on guidance from policymakers and changing ideas about progressive pedagogy, as a result of teachers enacting pragmatic, "responsibilised" subjectivities.

Although there was also not any clear sense of the teachers at *Lime Tree* putting forward their own *strong* version of English, the subject was consistently being framed within a struggle between child-centred pupil experience, personal response and responsibility for making sure that pupils were equipped for an exam that itself diverges from rather static concepts of cultural literacy. Simon Gibbons (2017) notes that the personal growth model of English, such as the one espoused by John Dixon in the 1970s, is still one of the most popular frames for teachers

understanding their subject, despite hostility towards it in the current policy environment.

The most definite theme to emerge from this chapter is the tension formed at the heart of teaching practice, regarding teachers teaching novels, poetry or English language. Most teachers at *Lime Tree* prioritised a preference for a child-centred pedagogy (which diverges from the conservative push for teacher-led instruction). This preference, however, was undermined by the ongoing intensification of neoliberal systems which are embedded in the architecture of the government's drive for schools to have "sharper, more intelligent accountability" systems and better school standards. It is in this tension that we see both the strongest level of compliance and the most forceful push back by practitioners. My fieldwork and interviews picked up on the discrepancies between what a teacher does and says in their classroom, and what they do and say in department strategy meetings. Philip referred to the 'fight' to get consistency in the schemes of work as one of ensuring 'equity in the student experience' (Philip, English teacher), despite talking about English as 'a bit more free-flowing' and developing 'curiosity'. A well-structured course might generate curiosity, but there is undoubtedly a tension here between trying to be creative in the classroom, whilst attempting to streamline the overall system to fit the standards agenda. The "free-flowing" nature of the subject must somehow be measured in terms of what 'we put into SIMS' and how the data from assessments can still be measured 'in terms of the National Curriculum levels' (Philip, English teacher). This is a tough balancing act.

Moreover, I have already noted in *Chapter Four* that the new head of English focused her pitch on standardising the curriculum to usher forward a more efficient English in the department that was fairer for the children. When she was speaking to her set four class, however, a discomfort emerges in terms of what the new examination system

means for her set of under-confident pupils. There is a pastoral frame here of wanting to protect her pupils from the blunt reality that one's English experience is geared towards three hours of final assessment:

> Teacher: "Not to frighten you but everything rests on the three hours of exams you sit". "Do any of you have siblings?"
>
> [No answer]
>
> Teacher: "Well if you do, they got to do something called a controlled assessment which meant we could have worked through it together. I feel sorry for you all and I disagree with it. So, no matter the educational environment, I'm here for you guys... but everything we do is geared for the exam.

<div align="center">(Annabelle, new head of English)</div>

Regardless of whether it concerns pay or pedagogy, teachers in the 21st century expect politicians and policymakers to intervene. Teachers must regularly negotiate this with their own values. The professional wears many hats throughout a school day, and responses to policy almost always oscillate in that space about what is best for the child and the harder headed need to achieve performance. In many respects, most teachers at *Lime Tree* were working with a pragmatic mindset[57] in the sense of trying to adhere to their preferred values whilst also being aware of how policy could bend practice further away from student-centred pedagogies, or irrevocably shift what it meant to teach English. Neil noted that the debate about performance-related pay in 2013 (DfE 2013a) had made him question whether he had been 'a little idealistic about what English teaching was'... that perhaps it would involve abandoning those "soft 'airy fairy principles'... just to 'inch those kids to make that progress a little bit better' (Neil, English teacher).

Beyond the construction of subjectivities, the arguments and practices that practitioners drew on at *Lime Tree* demonstrated an attempt to justify their practice within the reality of the modern schooling

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[57] Joe Kirby has named his blog "pragmatic reform".

institution. At one level, a teacher may have a particular view about their subject, concerning how English can provide avenues for exploring the social world and their own experience of life. But they teach and justify their English teaching through negotiation in the "orders of worth" (1999; Boltanski and Thevenot 2006). "Pragmatism" at *Lime Tree* is found between the economics and industrial strategy of greater efficiency, streamlined data systems and "cleaner content" and the pastoral (domestic world). The domestic world contains a strong liberal impulse to adopt pupil-led pedagogies, as well as to provide a very personal space to respond to text and character. Its combination with the reality of external contexts, however, renders these ideals subordinate to other factors and responsibilities towards pupils. For many practitioners dealing with time and resource pressures, standardising the curriculum to maximise learning efficiency is itself a "moral" decision because it is deemed the most effective way to command exam success and allow children to get on in life.

The success of liberal governance is it brings forward 'responsible and prudential subjects' that take on 'very specific obligations' (Dean 2010, 262). This chapter has tried to show how teachers balance personal belief with a system that puts a lot of pressure on standardising learning objectives and pedagogical approaches. This theme is broadened in the next chapter when the topic of teacher professionalism, pragmatism, data practices and "affect" is discussed further. In particular, it attempts to draw together "global discourses" with the particularities of English teaching.

Chapter Six

Teacher Professionalism, or (Re)imagining the English Teacher

In the two proceeding chapters, I have attempted to piece together fieldwork data and theoretical insights to analyse the enactment of 2013 English reforms within the context(s) of an institutional school setting. In *Chapter Four*, I analysed department-level decisions about why specific curricular texts were chosen, by paying attention to how teachers understood the prospect of the reforms for their pupil cohorts, or how budgeting challenges and standardisation pressures curtailed reform goals to promote teaching a broader canon of content. Additionally, the chapter introduced a range of factors often absent from normative policy analyses, such as consideration of how external contexts, such as the centrality of standards in English schooling, or internal factors, (for example, a department's ethos), can shape the trajectory of policy on the ground. This includes what particular policy frames were adopted by actors recontextualising policy. Following this, *Chapter Five* made the point that the classroom environment and the GCSE assessment structure play a pivotal function in the decisions that teachers make with regards to pedagogy and text choice. These were seen to be prioritised more heavily than the policy language of ministers. This drew attention to the divergences between the rhetoric of policy minister's goals about curriculum and pedagogy, and action taken at the 'coal face'. A static notion of "cultural literacy" was recontextualised and adapted within different practices and domains of the English GCSE, such as exam practice, or developing responses to literary texts.

In this chapter, I want to focus specifically on the notion of teacher professionalism in the reform discourse. I make the argument that above all else, the 2013 reforms are best read as an attempt by the state

to intervene on the discourse of teacher professionalism. I am concerned with how teachers mediate the interplay of enduring "global" discourses found in UK schooling, including standards and performance, and local contexts that include practitioner and school priorities, or networks of knowledge. To do this, I will develop the policy trajectory methodology in order to consider the different spaces where English is "done", enacted, or translated, including in department meetings, in policy artefacts (on walls or teaching materials), and the staff room.

I will begin with a discussion of what the 'evidence-informed' professional looks like according to the policy frame that politicians expect practitioners to work within. Following this, two prominent themes in my fieldwork serve as cases for analysis in this chapter. The first theme concerns the role of data and its connection to teacher professionalism. My fieldwork showed that in line with the intensified calls since 2010 for 'sharper, more intelligent accountability' (Gove 2011b), much effort was spent in developing better-streamlined systems of data tracking within the English department. How teachers approach the task of data management or the values they associate with it, however, is a complex story. There were many examples of divergent practices and strong views. Its significance for discourses of professionalism is the connection between policy subjects and the deployment of the quantitative, or "technical" dimensions of practice that enable policy subjects the capacity to work on themselves. Beyond this, data also evokes what Sam Sellar refers to as 'affective intensities', or the feelings associated with such practices (2015a, 131). Data and the accountability systems that are joined to it become fundamental tenets in the ongoing process of the "responsibilisation" of individuals working in schools, which in turn are bound up with emotions such as pleasure, burnout and guilt.

The second related theme concerns the role that assessment policy plays in shaping teachers' subjectivities. The number of assessments grew in the school in order to expand the available data for the school and department and because of uncertainty about the reforms. My work at *Lime Tree* suggested that teachers are both sceptical of the policy frame that assessment policy is articulated in, but that it powerfully compels teachers' sense of professional duty and pragmatism. The analysis discusses how teachers work with different policy frames simultaneously by negotiating different value systems and practices. Assessment policy, like data, has both a local signature, where schools develop mock GCSE questions or ongoing "in-house" class tests, as well as a wider significance that feeds into the overall data loop of GCSE results nationally. This qualification framework is deeply embedded in a discursive framework of standards and performance ('more, higher, better!'), which carries with it real material weight when it comes to decisions that are made at school level (Ball et al. 2012).

6.1 Professionalism in Neoliberal Schooling: Evidence, data and assessment

The two previous chapters have drawn more broadly on decisions and practices within "the department" (chapter four), and the classroom setting (chapter five). This chapter is concerned more specifically with individual teachers and the way they relate to policy discourse through their thought, "talk" and practices, and ultimately how this feeds into the development of their professional subjectivities. The role of problematisation is to consider how policy develops subjectivities that align with the state's aims and goals. For instance, we might ask what "problem" does the desire to incorporate data systems supposedly solve? How does this solution conceive of the role and purpose of the teacher to the extent that their professionalism is understood? Problematisation makes politics visible and therefore demonstrates its contingency (Bacchi 2012a, 6). For those concerned with democratic

education, it is a valuable exercise to explain where compliance with policy discourses emerge, or to identify spaces to rework policy by utilising alternative modes of interpretation[58].

The Evidence-Informed Professional: Policy frames by the state

One of the core themes of this reform, within the assemblage of speeches, documents, has been the intervening debate about what a teacher in 21st century England might be and do. We can see this in ministers' rhetoric about knowledge-based pedagogies, and find it bound up in the 'professional autonomy' master signifier. Nick Gibb, reflecting on the first coalition parliament (2010-2015) describes the policy rationale as 'autonomy, intelligent accountability and the best teaching methods' (Gibb 2017c). Such "success" rests on the lynchpin of a particular way of conceiving of teaching. Conservative ministers have regularly stated that the education reforms, more broadly, have aimed to envisage a new type of teacher. This thinking is bound up in Gove's teachers as 'professionals not labourers' trope, which has implications for how he sees teachers approaching evidence and data, the management of their public image or how they position themselves in relation to union politics (Gove 2013c). Gibb has been vocal too about the importance of the evidence-informed professional (2016g; 2017a), which as *Chapter Three* pointed out connects the use of evidence to a particular notion of "the teacher".

The language accompanying the reforms has been mainly focused on supposedly developing the 'calibre of teachers' (Gibb 2016d). In strengthening particular networks of teacher-researchers that by and large are core knowledge enthusiasts, much has been made of a small segment of 'pioneers' that have tried to position debates around professional development into this space. I have referred previously to

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[58] In the language of the logics of critical explanation, we might refer to role of "counter-logics".

those actors that have become influential on social media and blogging such as Joe Kirby and Daisy Christodoulou. Gibb has referred enthusiastically to conferences such as *ResearchEd* organised by Tom Bennett and the *Institute of Ideas* run by Claire Fox. Both networks favour the advancement of a knowledge-led curriculum favoured by Gove and Gibb. For Conservative ministers, these developments have been part of the jigsaw for bringing forward an 'academic renaissance in our education system' (Gibb 2014b). Central to achieving this aim is a 'research-informed' profession, which can be 'inoculated' from falling victim to pseudo-educational research nonsense (Gibb 2017a). *Chapter Three* outlined the conservative strategy in some detail, but these arguments can be summarised and aligned together as a combination of trying to reposition teacher training away from universities and getting them to be aware of evidence-informed strategies in their teaching practice. Much of the focus here has been on the government's EEF toolkit funding, as well as the attempt to promote the teacher-led initiatives in order to begin 'cultivating a culture in the profession that is prepared to challenge and engage with research' (Gibb 2017c).

In his reflection on seven years of education reform by the conservatives, Gibb referred to the power of social media in allowing teachers to 'discuss the evidence with fellow professionals beyond the staff room in their school' (2017c). This 'vibrant community' had taken the lead in 'challenging education's prevailing orthodoxy' (Gibb 2017c). Some of these bloggers have helped to 'dissect constructivist and so-called child-centred teaching approaches' (Gibb 2017c). It is 'online rather than in academic journals' where these debates are being had (Gibb 2016g). This knowledge-transfer includes topics such as school's designing their assessment levels, curriculum (I discussed with reference Joe Kirby in the last chapter), as well as ideas about assessment.

Since 2010, there has been a change in emphasis accompanying the policy frame of professional development, to do with the bureaucracy of data and policy systems. This emphasis has been linked with a reframing of the teaching profession, embedding it in "the science of learning": neuroscience, cognitive psychology, meta-analyses from the (EEF), and "gold standard" randomised controlled testing. Teachers are tasked with mastering data systems and algorithms so that they can 'calibrate the balance of probabilities' for effective strategies (Freedman 2018) and employ the right nudge techniques. Additionally, Gove supported the impetus to make data publishable and more readily available for parents and communities, rather than the state which had become too cumbersome under New Labour (Gove 2012c). This practice has become a standard across other areas of bureaucracy too; we can refer back to Cumming's and Freedman's comments in *Chapter Three* that Whitehall is a dysfunctional place that has little idea about what is happening on the frontline. Overall, this can be read as an attempt to shift the debate of expertise, either empowering particular "pioneering" teacher-researchers or focusing attention on the function that data can play in removing the noise and messiness of everyday institutional interactions.

In my two examples below, I want to focus on the connection between 'thought', practices and the technocracy (*techne*). This *techne* is an essential component in any infrastructure of getting free agents to act in particular ways within their capacities (Dean 2010). As Dean reminds us, it is when 'thought' is connected with practices and techniques that we can think in terms of governmentality (42). Policy delivery combines practices through discursive articulations of core discourses of schooling, as well as the discomforts and contradictions, which are formed as a result (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 73). With this background, the ensuing analysis considers how English teachers

negotiated school-level data and assessment policy, within dominant policy discourses and their institutional and professional frameworks.

PiXL and English as a Form of Knowledge

At a macro level, the 2016 white paper refers to using data to inform system leaders rather than relying on Ofsted inspections (DfE 2016, 72). The surge of interest in data encapsulates the managerialist component of many modern governments and is a continuation of the New Labour era:

> *For governments of a technical-rationalist bent, it provides the perfect managerial tool, since it enables the complexity of schooling to be reduced to data – solid, comfortable, numerical data – data that enables robust comparisons to be made between individual learners and groups of learners, between teachers and schools (Mansell, 2007).*

> (Turvey, Yandell, and Ali 2012, 30)

At an individual school level, data is highlighted for improving classroom practice so that it may be shared effectively, and, where appropriate, used to 'drive school improvement' (Turvey, Yandell, and Ali 2012, 11). I have spent time considering the implications of this at different stages of my thesis, notably in my literature review and in *Chapter Three,* with reference to *intelligent accountability* and *the social logics of outcome-based evaluation*. The way data works at a micro-level is also important given its presence within everyday practices. In this section, I focus on how this backdrop plays out on a micro-level and the implication it has for English and English teachers regarding 'thought' and practices. Overall, it became evident that although data practices have increased as a result of the necessity to enact the new tenets of the reforms (lack of coursework and no clear grading boundaries), there was a negotiation over its role in relation to teachers' professional subjectivities and values. This recontextualization of data usage and the school's ethos on the whole child led to a synthesis or practices that might be described as "personalised data".

Data management was an essential theme in my fieldwork. Teacher values towards the use of data were often contradictory. The head of English often exhibited scepticism towards it, especially about its role on accountability and the new norm-distributed exam system: an infrastructure 'now built on sand' (John, head of English). He was, however, an enthusiast in developing the infrastructure to help pinpoint more personalised revision strategies and to accurately track what competencies pupils found most challenging in their GCSE. There was an implicit function in that it provided a level of accountability to be able to demonstrate that the department had a solid grasp on pupil progress.

During one department meeting, John used the data on PiXL (Partners in Excellence) to encourage teachers to use it in order to help them plan for the final few months before the GCSE examinations. PiXL was founded by Sir John Rowling in 2005 and was initially funded by the Labour government as part of a programme to improve London schools, also known as the London Challenge (see DfES 2003). When government funding ceased, PiXL continued but with schools purchasing a license for £3300 a year. This fee includes access to their annual conference, data guidance and insights and resources. PiXL describes itself as a 'not for profit partnership of over 1,600 secondary schools, 500 sixth forms, 600 primary schools, and 75 providers' and the largest network sharing best practice in order 'to raise standards' across England and Welsh schools (PiXL 2017). At least in *Lime Tree*, it had become an important part of building up the infrastructure necessary in order to track the progress of the new reforms.

Figure 2. shows how close analysis of pupils' grades could be pinned to specific criterion on the GCSE examinations in English literature and language.

Figure 2. "PiXLating English": The PiXL master sheet

This master copy is compiled from data collected during class-based mock examinations for the year where pupils focused on a different set of questions (there are 56 columns broken down into each assessment objective (i.e. exam question) in the Eduqas English literature and language paper). This fact means the grid includes information about a pupils' progress in answering questions across English language, the play, Shakespeare and the novel. It is the culmination of work by every teacher with a year 11 group. Coloured columns act as indicators to

break up the chart as well as to indicate, as in the case of the column with various colours of green, pink, yellow, and purple, how far behind (or ahead) a pupil is in relation to their predicted grade which is presented as a 9-1 grade in line with the new GCSE assessment criterion.

Given that this is a new reform with no historical data, the modelling for working out the grade boundaries has been provided PiXL. I was particularly interested in how PiXL slotted into the overall strategy for building the base for enacting the new GCSE reforms. Below is an extract from a discussion we had after I observed a department meeting:

> John – 'you know I don't think they've [the teachers] haven't quite got this all yet… when we're dealing with 100% linear exam and the controlled assessment has gone it's absolutely vital to know where things are going right and where they're going wrong… this gives you a good perspective… if a kid (or we) are struggling with teaching structure then we're got a way of looking at this… if it is timing then we can do something on this.'
>
> **Me – 'I was reading on the Ofqual blog today that they were warning teachers to be careful relying on PiXL with mocks because it could be inaccurate.'**
>
> John – 'well PiXL took a lot of data from schools last year…'
>
> **Me – 'yeah 100,000 pupils generated from schools so a statistically significant population…'**
>
> John – 'and they got it bang on 100% right… look if I've done all this work basically using the PiXL method… there are a couple of things I've changed because I didn't like how they formatted it… and I get the boundaries wrong this year I'm going to really have to think about it… as I guess are PiXL but we need to grade boundaries to get some idea of where we're working at… and of course it could all change the following year anyway'.
>
> **Me – 'when did you go to the PiXL conference in London?'**
>
> John – 'there was one about two years ago but PiXL has been going for about 10 years just it was used by people to game the system now we're trying to work out the system'.
>
> (fieldnotes, conversation with John, Head of English)

Although the head of English had been using PiXL in previous years, it had become an essential tool with the new reforms because the department needed to try to 'sit down and work out grade boundaries' (John, head of English). The reforms had left schools and departments unsure about how many marks made up a particular level. Moreover, John's comments focus on the fact that the removal of coursework and the move to the linear exam had meant a need for better overall tracking of data throughout the year. He referred to coursework as 'the crutch' for senior leaders in determining a school's yearly progress and offering some guarantees about the final year results. John referred to the fact it had been 'generally looked at and ignored' in the English department given that it relied on a way of working that was 'alien to most people's practice' (John, head of English).

Throughout my fieldwork chapters, English has been articulated in many different frames at the different cross-sections of policy work. Conservative politicians have discussed it within a policy frame of cultural literacy, understood as democratising knowledge as in the form of procedural fairness to allow fair competition to emerge amongst all pupils, despite their class background. The structural elements of the reform are characteristically neoliberal, with a focus on a particular framing of autonomy and data practices. At the *context of practice*, many teachers referenced a growth model view of the subject, but defined in pragmatic terms: English is understood as a core subject for pupils to move on in their future. In terms of reflecting on the role of power, new forms of knowledge are mobilised when technical or "mundane" everyday tasks connect people and ideas.

In his book on governmentality, Mitchell Dean points to how the *analytics of government* encapsulates how government is deployed as a rational and thoughtful activity (the episteme of government) (2010). For Dean, this becomes visible between *forms of knowledge* and practices: this captures how each informs or gives rise to the other. PiXL

provides an insightful case where 'thought' about English becomes visualised. The grid shows an idea of English abstracted from the complexity of a whole GCSE course (with its texts), and every pupil across the year taking it, their progress and aims. PiXL is an extension of data infrastructures already present at *Lime Tree*. Its increasing centrality in the practices in the department and its personalised format for English demonstrated the number of visions and objectives (such as personalised revision, more accurate and real-time monitoring of progress, changes to what information about progress looks like, teachers shifting towards data systems to direct interventions). In all, it is a vision of English that reorganises practices and institutional spaces: 'when I started fifteen years ago, there was hardly any data other than predicted targets' (Hannah, English teacher, field notes).

In fantasmatic fashion, the "grip" of PiXL comes from the fact it embodies a powerful technology for visualising the department's priorities in enacting the reform (getting pupils to pass their exams successfully). PiXL brings with it a promise of complete and adequate knowledge. Moreover, it also allowed for other existing teacher values to converge. During one staff meeting, the PiXL framework was used by teachers to identify "winnable" pupils (those underachieving but would respond to intervention). The following extract is from my field notes and captures part of a department meeting.

> ### Follow up on tracking 5 – 'picking the winnables' and a 'forensic PIXLating of the data'
>
> *The staff meeting deals with 'tracking 5', a school initiative across all faculties to get teachers to identify 5 winnable subjects. This time they are looking at any five pupils, Pupil Premium or not, to offer interventions such as 'phoning home to parents', 'a faculty report', and 'literacy intervention'.*
>
> *Emma – 'so it's winnables...okay, not pupil x then'. [laughter].*
>
> *Elizabeth – 'you know this pupil should be doing better, he's working at a good standard and the data doesn't say it here but he's going to fail isn't he because the examiner just won't*

be able to read his work… we've said this before but we've been
told he can't use a computer because he doesn't qualify for it'.

The entanglement of "world views" shaped teachers "thought" about pupils within this negotiation of priorities, values and technical government. Once again, Boltanski and Thevenot help explain how actors negotiate within different worldviews; there is a convergence here between utilising PiXL to discuss measurable progress (economic) as well as teacher values of equity, caring and affective responses (domestic). The combination of values from staff members and the increasing reliance on data practices led to a particular form of personalisation. PiXL demonstrates the attempt by practitioners to hone in on individual pupils in ever-more detail. For instance, John talks about personalised revision plans and the way PiXL was incorporated into further discussions about pupils who might benefit from further intervention. Practitioners are drawn in and provided with the space to incorporate 'moral' concerns that are directed by a technical instrument. Between the time of my employment at *Lime Tree* and subsequent research project, I noticed pupil data being attached to images of the pupils in the staff room.

"I don't deal in data; I deal in children": Data, Affect and Teacher Subjectivity

Though data practice is often considered as a technical instrument of advanced liberal government, it was the "feelings" that the practices evoked in practitioners (and pupils) that seemed most interesting. Data induces 'feelings' and can be a primary cause bring about 'pride, disappointment, relief', among pupils (Sellar 2015a, 131). I remember some (usually very apathetic) vocational students passing their oral English and coming into the classroom the next day happy about their success. I also remember pupils in tears over mock results that were below their targets. The school had asked teachers to make a concerted effort, to be honest about pupils who had failed their mock (in one test

at the start of the year around 90% had failed to achieve a good GCSE). This hardball approach was met sceptically by some teachers in the department:

> *I don't really like it to be honest... I always used to try and soften the blow a bit because a lot won't have done well and they [leadership team] think it will give them a kick but actually it makes the apathetic more apathetic and the anxious more anxious.*
>
> *(Neil, English teacher, fieldnotes)*

These emotions were mirrored by teachers who regularly concerned themselves with how their pupils might do. It was a cause of anxiety for teachers that felt pupils were not going to hit their target grades and brought about phone calls home and endless anxious discussions in the staff room about pupil apathy. In this case, data practices bring the practice of English teachers closer to the state objectives of practice organised within the constructs of the *social logics of intelligent accountability*, by encouraging responsibilisation through 'self-inspection' and 'self-monitoring' (N. Rose 2005, 11). As a result, this makes 'our subjectivity the principle of our personal lives, our ethical system, and our political evaluations, that we are freely, choosing our freedom' (11). From the perspective of governmentality literature, we can refer to Rose's view that the state works by 'forging a symmetry between attempts of individuals to make life worthwhile for themselves, and the political values of consumption, profitability, efficiency and social order' (10-11).

During the staff meeting referenced earlier on PiXL, one teacher asked in the meeting whether so much data was necessary:

> Nicole – 'John, is it necessary to have this much data for the whole of year 11?'
>
> John – 'well, it means you can do an awful lot with it. I've looked through my individual kids and have given them all a personalised revision plan based on where they're struggling. I can see this kid has got a problem with

retrieval questions then I can set something for that... I did it over half-term'.

(fieldnotes, English department meeting)

In this exchange, John points to the fact that this quantity of data can be used productively in order to tailor better, more personalised revision and teaching. However, there were concerns raised about the time teachers had to put into maintaining such a system. During this meeting, the head of data, assessment and tracking dropped into the meeting in order to check that everything was going okay and to remind teachers that they needed to fill in the latest round of tracking data. At this point, one of the teachers brought up a general discomfort about the intensity of labour needed to maintain the management of data with school tracking and PiXL and requested more training and time.

If we accept Jude Chua Soo Meng's (2009) view the ends of teaching as one of turning a situation into a preferred situation (perhaps where a pupil gains knowledge or becomes more enlightened), then teaching itself is a form of design that can be shaped by the value systems of an institution (or person). Constructing a form of the utility of teaching within the framework of the 'terrors of performativity' which is organised by 'measurable performance goals' can shape things such as design cognition into something undesirable (Meng 2009, 159). The affective "grip" that data holds over different policy subjects is captured by Sellar who remarks the "affective" qualities of data change depending on who is wielding it. Global policy entrepreneurs and politicians might radiate enthusiasm and confidence using it in their quest for influencing high stake policy decisions, but this is contrasted with 'senses of fear and uncertainty' for practitioners when it is being used to 'evaluate staff performance and to legitimise reform agendas' which have implications for teachers (Sellar 2015a, 142).

As Ball points out, technologies of performativity include both an 'emotional' status dimension with a rational and objective appearance (2003, 221). Techniques of performance can 'engender individual feelings of pride, guilt, shame and envy' (221), or look to displace the values of teachers (Meng 2009). There is a perpetual tension between seeking trust in a data system (looking for something secure in a new reform were very little is known), whilst acknowledging in your interview, or joking in the staff room, that this trust is absent because of a flaw in the system. This is an example of what Massumi (2015, 30) calls 'priming', which refers to a process that creates the conditions for a subject that is 'triggered' or incited to act on producing something (i.e. the data system), as opposed to participating in a system because one might be rewarded or punished (this might change with performance-related pay). Nonetheless, you are bound to participate in a system you do not actually trust.

This distrust in the power of data was encapsulated in the idea that it was somehow inauthentic, or led to authentic accounts of the learning process:

> *It all comes up on the system as we put it in but again like I just said you see minus 1 minus 2 it doesn't always reflect for our subject anyway just what that actually means to the child... I now don't deal in data I deal in children... I mean John will say that's because some teachers can't do it but I don't need the data to tell you which kids in the class need the help... in fact, sometimes the data suggests it wrong because you've got so much else to put into that as a teacher that's your role to whether they need help.*

<div align="right">(Elizabeth, English teacher)</div>

Neil discussed the scepticism he had towards the overall notion that more data points even offered one clearer perspective on pupil progress:

> *I've become very sceptical about it... I think the more you try to gather the more... the tighter you try to grab on to data the more it sorta slips through your fingers so the idea that with our students... you enter data more regularly and that gives a more accurate picture of their progress... I don't think*

it does I think... you know students sort of progress is an up and down thing and whether you capture on that given day doesn't mean that's where they are... it's not holistic enough to me... I think the fewer data points there are the more accurate the sort of judgement would be.

(Neil, English teacher)

For Neil again, this granular, piecemeal notion of progress was unintuitive given that such progress was often 'intangible' (Neil, English teacher). This realisation led him to adopt data strategies that were divergent to the drive within the school towards lining up data at an individual teacher level, with the overall school's data, by utilising a standard system:

I suspect what I do is... let's say I mark a set of stories and look at the grades in my book... but there'll be some students there who I think that's not a true reflection of their ability and progress... that student finishes the story or made a choice for a lousy ending... and I will modify the grade in the light of [what] I think gives a more accurate picture... I think the school... maybe not now but a little while ago wanted tracking internally to almost exactly match what students were doing so it would be a snapshot of their current performance... I suppose my data often doesn't reflect that... it's a bit more holistic or subject judgemental, not judgemental... it's sort of more judge it more broadly so I dunno someone might look at my books and look at the data that I enter and say you're doing this wrong but that would be me trying to make my data more useful and effective.

(Neil, English teacher)

Richie then says we can't copy and paste that I would argue that I'm so accurate at predicting the end of the year my mine would be the same would be every single time that's what a good teacher is all about so now I play with data.

(Elizabeth, English teacher)

This passage describes a tentative admission to the figure of playing around with the data, and there were many other examples where teachers drew on their intuition and order to make their data more

bespoke to their own needs. One might think that this would involve pushing the data higher in order to look better, but many of the teachers went about underperforming their data or playing around with it. There was a consensus, however, that these practices of "playing around with the data" were a result of 'the state of the data system' (Elizabeth, English teacher). As Ball notes in his commentary on performativity, many teachers feel that ossified data practices introduce a sense of inauthenticity into the process: at *Lime Tree* this was manifest in the way it redefined the relationship a teacher has with a pupil (such as Elizabeth's: 'I don't deal in data; I deal in children'). It is worth just considering how this encapsulates a certain view of "authenticity" in the teaching process. The authenticity of practice brings with it a particular notion of utility, which in many of the teacher's answers unearthed a contradiction between the state's motives for better control of the data systems in schools and their own experience and judgements as teachers. This experience fed into discussions about how teachers made distinctions between different classroom dynamics. In light of the school tying their data infrastructure to having to linear progress across the school year, Elizabeth notes how an element of distinction can build up a better rapport with pupils who have struggled academically:

> *Perhaps I'm a bit older because now they're now saying that with the progress 1-8 that those kids have got to show progress... if you approach them in the same way as another group you won't because you'll alienate them so I find that I am more relaxed... I have more rules in place for them which they still break but actually I think the expectation is different the way I relate to them... I still want them to do as well as they can but... think compared to say a set 3 where you get data, and they've got to be a C and you remind them of that constantly.*

(Elizabeth, English teacher)

We might exchange 'older' for 'experience', but for Elizabeth, tying in a level of flexibility to how she communicated data with her vocational pupils allowed her to develop 'a rapport with' and be 'more conscious of their needs'. For her, school rules were a guide which she deviated from

when judgement and intuition took over. There was a big push throughout the year on making pupils aware of their progress. Reminding pupils constantly that they needed to be a B or a C grade level when they know that they are working at an E seemed 'kind of unkind' (Elizabeth, English teacher)[59]. It is possible to see this in Neil's comments, too, that increasing the data points often feels like it is providing a worse reflection of the reality of progress, which can be unpredictable. This "snapshot" approach, came second to his "broader judgement", or his reference to "subject judgement": gesturing to how English can pose its challenges for tracking linear progress. Sam Sellar has made the point that using standardised testing instruments, in place of teacher judgement still requires a level of creativity to make measurement possible: teachers who interpret quantitative data must have 'a feel for numbers' (2015a, 133).

Dreyfus and Dreyfus (2004) note the differences in 'phenomenological descriptions' between novices and experts and give us an insight into the way more experienced teachers can draw on their confidence to provide a buffer space for their practices (180). Experienced practitioners feel more comfortable utilising their experience and judgement and therefore will not be so reliant on standardised systems and practices that new practitioners must draw on. This model focuses on how those with the best performances drew conclusions 'based on intuition, experience and judgement'; it is not clear that attempts to externalise these into rules and explanations, can replicate intuitive behaviours' (Flyvbjerg 2001, 22). Experts are more able to 'intuitively' see 'what to do without recourse to rules' (Dreyfus 2004, 181). For Flyvbjerg, the onset of rule-based rationality threatens professions where 'practical skill occupies central importance' but where 'epistemic

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[59] Many pupils had been given ambitious stretch targets: 'it used to be three levels of progress but the government now expect four' (Emma, English teacher, fieldnotes). The feeling from pupils in the room was that 'they would never get it' (pupil, vocational group, fieldnotes).

science and didactics' have become popular (2001, 24). With all the focus on implementing standardised processes across the school, Elizabeth recalled a senior leadership's comments after a lesson observation of her teaching her GCSE vocational pupils: "I forgot what a difference a... you know... a teacher that has a rapport with them can make to their [pupils'] own self-confidence". Often it takes some qualitative reflection, in order to recognise and provide some resistance to dominant discourses of schooling where 'urgent so often drives out the important' (Abbott, Middlewood, and Robinson 2015, 182). Though data practices currently hold the mantle of "urgent", they are negotiated in a matrix of value systems where experience plays a vital role in a quantifiable system of measurement.

Arguing these reforms by using the master signifier of 'professional autonomy', the state has developed a particular set of values and judgements through the techniques, practices and 'thought' that are characterised within *the social logics of responsibilisation* and *outcome-based evaluation*. In short, and in practice, professional autonomy is about managed outputs. At *Lime Tree*, however, there is a struggle over what measures or indicators are considered valid, and what determines satisfactory performance (Ball 2003, 216). Ball draws on Lyotard's concept of the law of contradiction where two orders of activities mesh as a result of an intensification of new ways of ordering practice. For instance, many of the teachers refer to some first-order activities of teaching (such as direct contact with their pupils, trying to develop resources and pastoral concerns); this is then underpinned more frequently than ever by second-order activities, such as monitoring performance, management and data, which takes up greater quantities of time. The technical dimension of policy interacts with the broad values found in teachers' actual practices, which showed some divergence from the state's drive to make things "cleaner" or more "efficient". This divergence came about because there was scepticism

that this working practice helped teachers overall and because there was still some room to make data fit into a broader constellation of professional practice that originated from other ideas about what experienced teaching looked and felt like.

As Ball goes on to state: 'the responsibilities which are generated by the delivery chain mean that many teachers find it difficult to establish a clear ethical position in relation to the *techne* of performance' (Ball et al. 2012, 89). However, in this final quote, Hannah encapsulates a version of authenticity and authority that connects an appeal to her pupils for their ultimate trust in an insecure and clouded policy environment, and in so doing manages to negate performativity as the core organiser for her practice and professionalism:

"I'm just telling my class to trust me... I know what I'm doing'.

(Hannah, English teacher, fieldnotes)

"Marking Armageddon": Assessment policy technologies and buffering spaces

Assessment policy at *Lime Tree* had changed since 2015 in response to enacting some of the new tenets of the GCSE. Notably, the school had taken the step to have more mock assessments. A couple of prominent themes emerged about this. The first was that the school wanted to find a strategy to get pupils more engaged and aware of their ongoing attainment progress. The rise in mock assessments had also coincided with many more revision sessions also being run throughout the year. The school's concern about its "room for improvement" Ofsted arguably fed into this. It was unclear whether this had been successful because teachers reported increasing apathy as the academic year went on. By late April, some teachers questioned whether the school had 'gone too hard too early' and whether pupils had 'switched off' (Philip, English teacher, field notes).

The second reason for the increased use of assessments seemed to be a result of the fact that the school were working 'in the dark' about where their cohort fitted compared to the whole country (John, head of English). A large part of this was the new grading system, moving from levels of progress and letter grades to a scale of 9-1. Most of the teachers I spoke to referred to the difficulty they had in working with the new scale given that they were working 'with very little in the way of descriptors' (Philip, English teacher). Middle managers and leadership members had been trying to piece together the gaps and ended up using the old National Curriculum levels to create a standardised grid for teachers[60]. Assessments became a new empirical tool for developing the grade boundaries aided by the PiXL methodology:

> So one of the things I did probably around about Christmas time was took all of the assessment, all of the numbers, all of the maths using PIXL's kind of assumption of where the grade boundaries would be for four and seven and then where they think the others may fall... and I came up with a grid which when you're marking out of anything basically you can convert it into where a grade boundary should be. Now until the results come out in August we have no idea how accurate we are... as long as we as a faculty continue to meet and look at assessments that is what is I think is "24 out of 40"... yes that's our standard.

> (John, head of English)

This practice made sense for the school given that they needed to try and place themselves against other schools to make sure they were performing at the right level. There was an added anxiety (felt across every school no doubt) of not knowing whether pupils were working at the correct standard, or how they compared to others. Gibb foresees

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[60] Translation work here draws on the previous ways of measuring work to help construct the new assessment levels. Throughout the year, teachers and pupils were consistently reverting back to discussing their work in terms of the "old grade C". It will be useful to know, as schools develop their own system "after levels" (Gibb 2015b), what effect this has had on institutional practice and decisions. Moreover, how does overlaying the new system within an already-established context inflect how the new grading systems are talked about: will there be new boundary grades? i.e. level 4 is the new C grade?

'more assessment, not less' in schools, but 'not centrally determined and not high stakes' (2015b). Removing assessment levels makes sense within an educational programme of reforms organised through *the social logics of outcome-based evaluation*. This change is meant to liberate schools to produce a tailored form of assessment that reduces prescription from the government about what constitutes a particular level or not and to 'develop assessments which provide clear evidence of attainment and progression' (2015b). As I have already stated, PiXL had attempted to construct grading boundaries by drawing on mock assessments of 100,000 children; Ofqual shared this information with schools but stated that they could 'rely on any predictions of grade boundary'. Schools such as *Lime Tree* felt compelled to increase the number of data points from which they could draw insights about their progress.

Data can be read as the technical instrument for providing ways of measuring and seeing (whether quantitatively or qualitatively), within broader 'programmes and rationalities of government' programmes, intelligibilities and strategies' (Dean 2010, 4). Beyond this, though, specific practices, notably data and assessment work, can help 'render social problems governable' by delineating 'a proper task and function for schools and roles and responsibilities for teachers'. It was telling that in the department meetings I attended, teachers spoke more about utilising data and assessment than they did about designing curriculum. Even when learning was discussed, this was framed within the assessment agenda. The synthesis of learning and assessment has reconstituted the boundaries about what is up for discussion. Whilst *outcome-based evaluation* shifts the task of day-to-day measurement to teachers, this 'gives rise to the general method of discipline, producing a general and essential transformation' (Ball et al. 2012, 514). This transformation happens through what is discursively-limited in conversation and thinking about English teaching.

I often found (unsurprisingly given how new and vague the assessment criterion was) that teachers struggled to identify a good level GCSE (i.e. a level four (low 'C') or five (high 'C')). Many found that pieces of work they were marking converged to level three or four and that the scale had not allowed them to differentiate pupils towards the lower end of the scale. Neil joked that the scale only needed a fraction of his keyboard:

> *That's it... it's like the only part of the keyboard that we use... that it's stupid having all these levels which describe... but you only... it's like a shower. Eddie Izzard talks about your shower dial that it goes from there all the way to there... but the only bit you're interested in is that or that because that's the differences and it's like we're working in that tiny bit where: 'is that a three or a four?'*

(Neil, English teacher)

Gibb has recognised that devolving assessment will prompt schools to draw on their own professionalism to 'ensure their pupils reach those standards' (2015b). It is too early to tell what effects this "general transformation" will have on teacher subjectivities, as they (and their schools) take on more responsibility for assessing pupils within their framework. Its immediate effect at *Lime Tree*, however, was an attempt to increase the available data points by way of mock examinations. It is also possible that businesses such as PiXL will continue to pick up the pieces by offering external help for a fee. In one interview I had with John, he talked about how it would have been useful to increase progress tracking with regards to the skills that pupils need', though he accepted that most of the department's teachers would reject doing this.

Nonetheless, if schools do not have the expertise to develop systems on their own, or if, as with *Lime Tree*, there are genuine pressures on the improving attainment data, then a lot of energy will be put into developing systems that proliferate the quantity of data (much of which hones in with ever-greater detail on needs of the individual pupil).

Although systems such as PiXL *potentially* offer teachers an insight into which exam skills any particular pupil was struggling with, it still requires a lot of extra labour. This comes at a time when the DfE and Ofsted have made it explicit that schools are not expected to collect endless reams of data that they and 'don't want to see a specific amount, frequency or type of marking' (Harford 2018). Despite this intervention by Ofsted, the frequency of assessments organised by the English department increased, and this resulted in more marking.

Recent work by Irfan Sheikh and Carl Bagley attempts to capture the 'possible impact of affect and emotions as mediating factors' that influence individuals responding to the processes of change that are associated with policy enactment (2018, 47). That is, rather than see "affect" as an instance of *association* between social actors and policy (e.g. letting off steam to a colleague), it focuses on the 'emotional response to the policy under enactment' (45). This research is a useful addition for reminding us that the enactment process is 'dependent on human interaction and engagement' (58). At *Lime Tree*, assessment policy provoked affective responses and connected to many other tenets of the reform. I identified dozens of connections between the affective responses of teachers and the six concepts posited in their paper. However, I have limited space so only draw on two, which connect the role of assessment discourse.

1. **Decisional legitimacy.** There were comments throughout the year about the efficacy of the reform aims, through 'questioning the authenticity and rationale of the curriculum changes in terms of meeting the academic needs of students' (Sheikh and Bagley 2018, 51). In *Chapter Five*, Jennifer (English LSA) asked whether the aim to introduce disadvantaged pupils to new literary texts really worked given that it was just 'one great big bunch of stuff that they can't access'. Returning to a norm-referenced exam also seems to grate

against the government's attempt to link 'the high road to social justice', with knowledge acquisition (Yandell 2017, 249):

> *Gove is kind of trumpeting the idea of the intellectual rigorous curriculum completely ignoring the fact the bottom 20-30% who will have access to this curriculum won't succeed in it... we've gone back to the idea of non-referenced examinations so the bottom end are always going to be the bottom end and the C/D border you may as well roll a dice as to whether they're going to pass or fail.*

> (John, Head of English)

The explicit connection (and collision) of changes to the curriculum (as cultural literacy) and the way it is assessed had led to scepticism towards the policy ambitions of ministers to promote social mobility through accessing new knowledge. Ultimately, the "cohort-referenced" system is set up in a way to allow some pupils to move into the next stage of their education, whilst stopping others. This irony was not lost on the department given that whatever knowledge might be passed on; there was no substantive change in the type of pupils who failed their examinations. Would knowing about Virgil help you if you could not even secure a post-16 college interview because you were on the wrong side of the bell curve? It should be pointed out here once again that Hirsh is more concerned about cultural literacy with its ends towards 'peace, inter-communication and the tradition of toleration among multiple sub-cultures' (Hirsch 2017, 7).

This contradiction arguably led to teachers and support staff switching off from the softer policy ambitions. At times, teachers at *Lime Tree* questioned the motivation of politicians such as Gove. John noted the reforms were better understood as Gove's volition 'to assess and record and neatly package educational success in the clothes of academic rigour' (John, head of English). Assessment policy, in particular, comes with already-embedded discourses and messages: Ofsted, high-stakes, performance management, and PiXL technologies.

Given the propensity of many teachers to understand assessment discourse ushering in the interests of external forces, Gove's zealous twinning of curriculum and assessment (Gove 2012e) led some teachers to consider that assessment had become the learning. After all: 'testing should not be thought of as separate from learning but as integral to it' (Cummings 2013, 71). The broader implication of instruments such as PiXL is to calibrate curriculum knowledge and objectives within a framework for continuous assessment: a way to nudge teachers in particular directions. This programme encompasses teacher-led, knowledge-driven lessons that stop a teacher from deviating (or "experimenting") too far. It is not surprising then that teachers routinely 'exhibit scepticism regarding the policy process, which they perceive as being inauthentic and controlling' (Sheikh and Bagley 2018, 53).

2. **Deprofessionalisation/professional and emotional investment.** Sheikh and Bagley also refer to teachers' responses that capture the potential for policy to evoke a feeling of being de-professionalised, where the 'compulsory obligation' to engage with a new policy in their practices can lead to a 'feeling of powerlessness', and 'emotional unease and discomfort' (2018, 54). These are themes that emerged from the school's assessment policy and data-driven practices. Some teachers referred to the piles of books they had to get through in order to provide pupils with grades. There were peaks and flows with this, with some parts of the school year being busier than others, but it was a consistent theme throughout. Each day, for about a month, a teacher would depict (usually satirically), current events occurring in the department. The theme of marking and assessment appeared frequently. A material evocation of this was found in the picture (Figure. 3) drawn by one of the teachers on a countdown to the end of the Autumn term. It shows a humorous take on how the department was dealing with excessive levels of marking as a result of mock tests.

I asked Neil about the picture in our interview, and what is conveyed about the current overload of work:

> *It was John's phrase I think [Marking Armageddon], but it captures the absurdity of our task... I think all teachers would acknowledge that it's just the kind of job where's never the time to do just everything... and often there isn't time to do half the things that you want to do... at least well... or conscious or having to cut corners on that... going to do that marking I can't do planning... and yeah probably over the past few years of marking and demonstrating progress so I think to counter that you sometimes try and subvert it humorously... 'this is impossible... this is impossible'... I think it... yeah... there's just an absurdity and maybe when you joke about it makes you feel a bit better about not being able to keep up with it... or maybe it just means that I'm not working hard enough [laughter]...*

> (Neil, English teacher)

It is possible to see this in Neil's comments that overloading assessment policy reduced other areas of teaching that had brought teachers to the job in the first place. I noted in *Chapter Four* that the staff room was often deemed a space where the English department was able to talk more freely about the school environment and policies. These sorts of stresses are buffered in the staff room, and humour plays an important role:

> *Oh, I value this so much... and I again hear about other schools where it's different I've always... always valued the staff room... this one in particular because it's a department staff room and other schools just had general ones... yeah but I find it hard to work through lunch I know some people do but I like to have that time at least... at least half an hour and... yeah... if you didn't have that bit of time talking to adults and either letting off steam or having a bit of a joke... yeah, I think... I think I'd go home at night a lot more sort of... down.*

> (Neil, English Teacher)

Ball et. al. mention that in their own work teachers were regularly 'sarcastic or sceptical about, and sometimes bemused and flabbergasted by, aspects of policy reforms mandated by central government or concocted by their own senior leaders', though whether this constitutes

resistance is unclear (Maguire, Braun, and Ball 2018, 3). Whether or not it suggests resistance, this certainly acts as a function of a buffering space against 'affective disruption', which refers here to a 'disruption to the emotional equilibrium of teachers', that comes about as a result of interference to 'the cognitive processes of sense-making' (Sheikh and Bagley 2018, 55).

Enacting policy involves doing so through a mode of responsibilisation. Everyday practices consist of degrees of negotiating or complying with reform demands. Humour might be best seen as a struggle against 'dominant forms of the teacher inscribed in policy', especially when accountability and performance discourses offer 'less scope for large-scale forms of critique and opposition' (Maguire, Braun, and Ball 2018) This insight is potentially fruitful if we accept that the individual is a site where discourses play out (Mills 2003, 97).

Sheikh and Bagley's work has been useful in providing me with a set of typologies to test themes in my fieldwork data. It is crucial for this trajectory study, however, to connect affective responses to the ideational component of policy work too in order to tackle themes arising from the mode of responsibilisation. Moore and Clarke's work refers to 'lopsided settlements' that work at a 'symbolic level through language but accepted at a deeper level in response to affect' (2016, 674). Humour and venting potentially offer a 'safe, rationalised space in which the tensions, the conflict and the disparities of professional life can be managed', though it should be recognised that this arguably limits other forms of opposition (674). I noted in *Chapter Four* that senior leaders never seemed to visit individual faculty staff rooms; it became an "other space" valued as a place to let off steam, or for the researcher, a site to detect how affect and emotions acted as mediating factors in individuals responding to policy enactment.
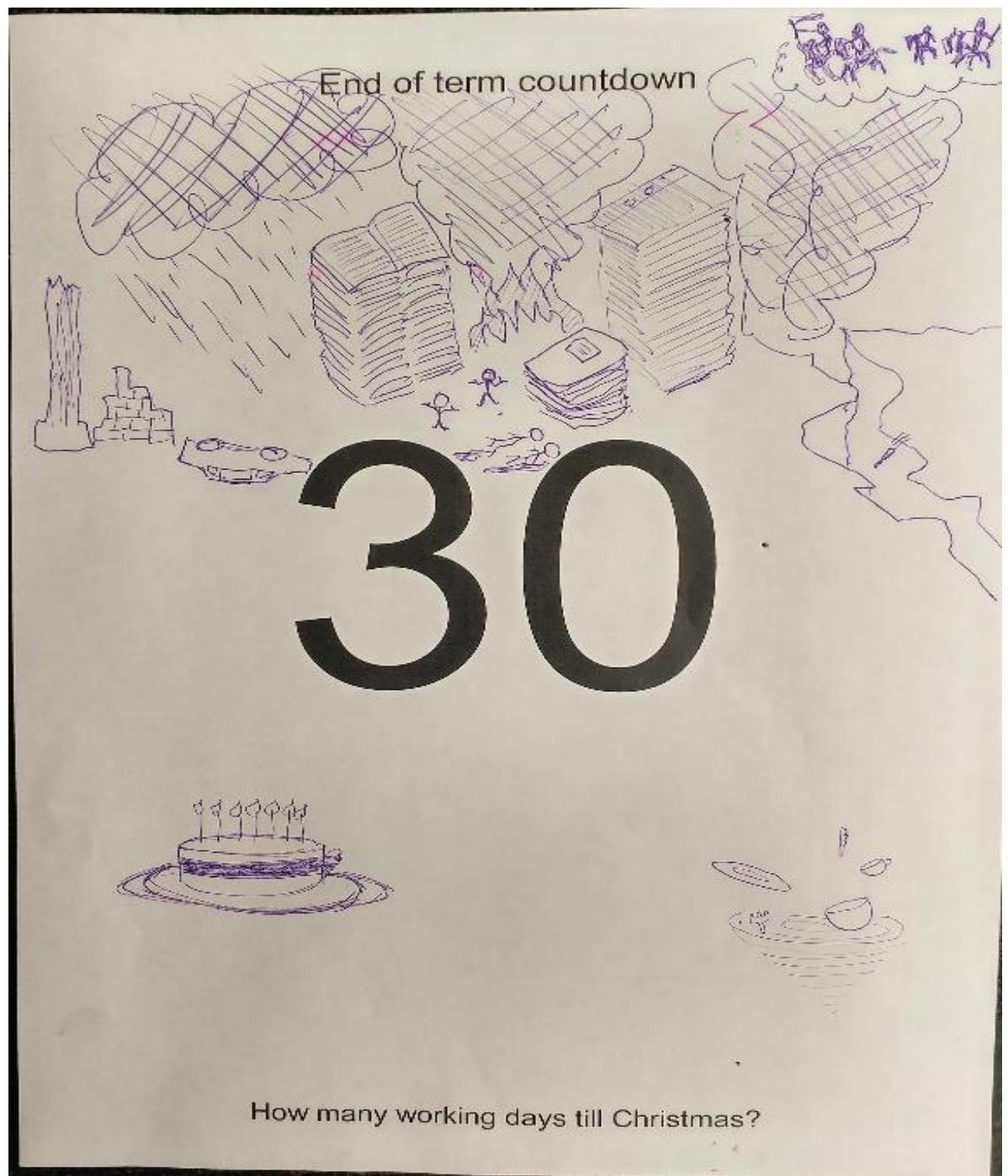
Figure 3. A Teacher's Response to Assessment Policy: "Marking Armageddon".

Figure 3. "Marking Armageddon" provides an artefactual manifestation of 'the experience of the impossibility of policy ideals and the sheer hard work of living with them', that build up to 'psychic and social costs' (Bibby quoted in Maguire, Braun, and Ball 2018, 9–10). Conservative politicians might take such an act as typical of those practitioners who try to find excuses (Gove 2012f). However, clearly, there is an attempt by a reflective teacher to try and understand the policy contradictions that are present in a pressured environment. The desire to teach (and then be blocked by practices that take up too much time), describes 'the paradoxical notion of cruel optimism', (Moore and Clarke 2016, 675), where teachers plough on, working within the system and chasing an ideal. A former teacher colleague once told me he hoped one day to have developed a system to be on top of his marking, and Hannah at *Lime Tree* said she felt 'less anxious' knowing her copious planning for the 2013 reforms should last several years. Then, of course, there will be a new reform change!

6.2 Conclusion

Once again, *Chapter Six* attempt to answer research question two. It focuses its attention on how the policy work of interpretation and translation intertwines with practices common to twenty-first-century schooling.

This chapter has focused on the notion of teacher professionalism, as it connects to data practices and assessment policy. It has drawn on empirical data from interviews, participant observation and policy artefacts, to consider how the intersection of "global" and "local" policy discourses have connected and altered as a result of the 2013 GCSE English reforms. Within my three fieldwork chapters, I can point to complex negotiations between practices, values systems and policy demands. The data in this chapter has played an essential role in the trajectory design of this thesis. I have attempted to capture some of the broader processes of enactment and its connection to individual

subjectivities. The role of affect ties together technical practices conducted by teaching and the ideational elements that form part of policy work. In building on Ball et al. 's study, I have attempted to ask practitioners to explain artefacts of policy work and practice. This thesis has attempted to delve into the less explored areas where policy work and practice happens.

As expected, data was an important theme. It is not something specific to English, but the case study has illustrated how subject-specific elements in English teaching can connect to, or diverge from attempts to standardise data within the schooling infrastructure. In effect, a programme such as PiXL reimagines what school English can be visualised as. The change to the linear examination, the school's focus on achieving trackable attainment data and the leverage provided to the department against senior leadership, played a role in motivating the ever-developing data infrastructures in schools. This data is becoming more personalised (to guide revision topics for pupils), as well as to guide teacher practice, although the latter was an emotive issue and there was evidence that teachers still drew on their judgement and intuition when dealing with data.

Technical themes around data also fed into assessment discourse, which had become a prominent part of teacher workload through the year. Mock assessments became the data points to fill in PiXL. In part, the changes to the grading system necessitated that teachers devote a large amount of labour to a system that could offer some direction to where their cohorts were heading. The construction of this assessment technology seemed quite atomised and derived from a technicist and managerial way of producing local policy. This understanding was in stark contrast to the insights that Simon Gibbon's (2013a) exploration of London Associations for Teachers of English (LATE) provided. The attempt to shape the assessment for O levels (the qualification prior to the current GCSE assessment system) was made with academics and

teachers working together to affect change at the local authority level. Arguably, assessment after levels, within the framework of professional autonomy, guided by standards and performativity discourses, only allows a 'thin', compliant autonomy to emerge.

The theme of *authenticity* was present across my discussion of both data and assessment policy. English teachers at *Lime Tree* negotiated this in articulating their ideas to me in interviews as well as in their everyday practices. Despite the rhetoric from ministers about the reforms fulfilling a new renaissance for teacher professionalism, the framework of professional autonomy arguably ossifies what it really means to be a professional in the sense of where real trust lies and expertise is understood to exist. There is a broader debate occurring about the notion of "professional" and its role and function (Susskind and Susskind 2015). Susskind and Susskind refer us to the role that technology will play in reorganising expertise (where it is stored, who controls it and our relationship to it) (110-11). For them, technology will 'work alongside tomorrow's professionals and partners' to 'outperform unassisted human experts' (2015, 117).

This theme was discussed in *Chapter Three* regarding the role comparative judgement might play. In an environment typified by "Marking Armageddon", this might seem to be a seductive solution. The implications for how it reorganises the purpose and function of teaching will have to re-examined as a result. Deference to technology, however, (as we have glimpsed in this chapter) removes the centrality of authenticity from the role of the professional. Ball and Olmedo capture the peculiar effects of the current system:

> *In the midst of these cold, machinic, calculative techniques, 'we become ontologically insecure' and 'uncertain about the reasons for actions' (Ball, 2003 p. 220). Teachers are no longer encouraged to have a rationale for practice, account of themselves in terms of a relationship to the meaningfulness of what they do, but are required to produce measurable and 'improving' outputs and performances, what is important is*

> *what works. We are in danger of becoming transparent but*
> *empty, unrecognisable to ourselves – 'I am other to myself*
> *precisely at the place where I expect to be myself' (Butler,*
> *2004, p. 15).*

> (Ball and Olmedo 2013, 91)

Much of this alienation is a result of not providing a normative questioning about the ends of teaching. The articulation of alternative values and ways of seeing is itself a form of counter-logics to the dominant patterns of thinking and practice (Glynos and Howarth 2007). This questioning is vital because alongside this "technical" development, is a policy environment, which is a result of a decade-long resentment towards the professional classes by prominent politicians such as Gove, and articulated more bluntly by political actors that look to shape politics by using political parties as vehicles for getting stuff done (i.e. Dominic Cummings). Cummings, for instance, refers to the lack of any objective criterion to pick out "good teachers". In its absence he contends that Doug Lemov's work (work that supposedly influenced the 2010-2013 reforms) provides 'good evidence for a strong focus on making teacher training empirical and therefore classroom-based, using immediate feedback on what works' (Cummings 2013, 80). Such a policy view supports an initiative such as Schools' Direct, whilst denigrating university-based PGCE courses.

Cameron's 2009 Conservative Party Speech talked about the 'time-wasting, money-draining, responsibility-sapping nonsense' of 'big government bureaucracy' (Cameron 2009). It also told a message that people should have control over the people who spend public money: 'we need transparency' (Cameron 2009). The apparent target was local government and bureaucrats, but the logic was extended under Gove (and Cummings) to the teaching profession too. Pupil Premium, as I have noted, combines two principles of autonomy overspending money and a strong accountability framework (Craske 2018). Gove wanted more data given to communities to hold schools to account; his special

advisor at the time wanted a way to negate the fact young people (16-25) are 'forced into dysfunctional institutions' and made to 'conform to the patterns set by middle-aged mediocrities' (Cummings 2013, 4)

Researching policy beyond a technicist lens has allowed me to pay attention to the complex interplay between trends moving towards neoliberal practices, but mediated within what Gert Biesta, (2016) (drawing on John Dewey), refers to as a "practical epistemology". This enquiry is experimental 'with respects to means, but also with respects to ends and the interpretation of the problems we address' (43). Social inquiry needs this kind of questioning. It is a bulwark against a prescriptive policy that sets out endless solutions to problems that do not always need to be solved (and in doing so it counters what Evgeny Morozov has termed "solutionism" (2013a). It is also a function of democratic thinking to consistently engage with the "ends" of education and not simply pour energy into whatever "means" are conscripted into a particular era. Doing so removes our ability to provide checks and balances (Morozov 2013b; 2014).

Chapter Seven

Further Discussion

The understanding that education policy is an incomplete and "messy" process has shaped this project. My underlying assumption is that policy analysis must extend beyond the formal state apparatus to consider its institutional context and enactment if we are to understand how it shapes practices and 'thought' on the ground. It set out to produce a policy trajectory study of GCSE English reform, and in so doing has drawn on analyses of both the state's conception of English as a subject and ideas about teaching, as well as empirical analyses of institutional and practitioner enactment of the reforms in a single secondary school. The focus on school English provided a fruitful case-study. My background interest in (and school experience with) the subject, alongside the fact that English has been a high-profile part of the overall conservative reforms, made it a good choice for study, both at a state level and its institutional enactment.

I tackle this chapter by restating my research questions before working through the implications of my theoretical and empirical insights for each of them. For research question one and two, I draw out some key themes and discussion points that have arisen from *Chapter Three* (research question one), and Chapters *Four, Five* and *Six* (research question two). This chapter then attempts to answer research question three by tying together my exploration of the divergences and convergences with Conservative policy aims as a result of practitioners enacting reform responding to their everyday contexts and within the dominant policy discourses that organise 21st-century schooling. My reflections on how the reforms have played out, in sometimes surprising ways, is tied to the workings of power, especially its manifestations at a micro-level, as a result of practitioners internalising particular discourses and subject formations (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 122).

Finally, this chapter will work through the limitations and implications of findings in this thesis for those concerned with the success of public policy development, and for critical researchers interested in what the insights might mean for debates in education research. In this sense, the chapter acts as a further discussion of the themes from my empirical work, as well as providing a detailed close-down to the thesis/

7.1 Analysis of the 2013 GCSE English Reforms

Reading the 'Gove Reforms'

1) How are ideas of schooling, teaching, 'the teacher', and English as a subject conceived of in the corpus making up the analysis of the 2013 reforms?

Research question one focused on gaining a better understanding of the Conservative reforms since 2010, by analysing a corpus of speeches, white papers and documentation. Some of this was specific to the 2013 reforms to English (such as the DfE programme of study for English), while other documents and speeches dealt with the Conservative reforms in the broader context of intervention on schooling discourses. The aim was to develop a reading of the reforms, by drawing on concepts from *the logics of critical explanation*, in order to demonstrate how seemingly disparate components can fit into a constellation of ideas about "teaching". This task characterised the constitutive components and concepts of the 2013 reforms, such as 'schooling', 'teaching', 'the teacher', 'English as a subject', and 'the learner'. In all, I posited a series of social logics which emerged from my analysis. Below, I posit three summaries that have arisen from this research.

1) **The Conservative reforms should be considered as a programme intended to reorganise the education landscape of English schooling. This point can be made for the examples this thesis draws on, namely the school English curriculum, pedagogy,**

and assessment because understanding how these elements are rhetorically and discursively constructed provides an insight into how ministers think and form public ideas about what constitutes expertise and 'good' and 'bad' teaching.

These reforms are a formation of several statements that characterise the states' conception of teaching. Following Bacchi (2012a), I read these 'prescriptive' reform texts as indicating that certain policymakers and politicians think something needs to change and therefore they constitute their reforms as solving a "problem"' (4). This explains why these reforms have been so readily positioned in opposition to previous governments, such as the cumbersome bureaucracy of labour ('tear down Labour's big government bureaucracy' (Cameron 2009)) or loosening the supposedly damaging grip of "progressivism" by certain institutions (i.e. the 'ideological conformism demanded by so many local education authorities' (Gibb 2017d)). Doing so has constituted the teaching debate in terms of a struggle between supposedly anti-evidence "progressivism" (child-centred learning) vs "evidence-based", (knowledge-dispersion teaching methods (Gibb 2016d). This argumentation aligns ideas about "good" teacher professionalism within the confines of political neutrality (Gove 2013c) and knowledge-driven pedagogies, and away from other institutions such as universities and LEAs. Bacchi, following Foucault's ideas, notes that detecting these patterns of practice can reveal 'modes or styles of governing that shape lives and subjectivities' (2012a, 5). My fieldwork work followed up how these constitutive ideas played out in practice. *Chapter Six*, in particular, tried to show how these discourses connect to the dominant disciplinary apparatus in schools (such as data use) that prompted teachers to at least partially align themselves with practices and translation work that reinforced a neoliberal conception of professionalism.

2) The Conservative reform programme reimagining education in English schooling should be considered contingent, though it is powerfully organised within a rhetorical-discursive framework that constructs the seductive concept of "professional autonomy" both as an empty signifier and nodal point.

My use of *the logics of critical explanation* allowed me to construct a series of social logics such as *knowledge-dispersion, outcome-based evaluation* and *responsibilisation* that have implications for how the state conceives of concepts such as "the teacher". Teachers are described as 'guardians of knowledge and figures of authority' (Gove 2013a), as well as professionals that should embrace an accountability system and 'high expectations' set by the state (Gove 2011c). These are the two reference points (between flattery and mistrust) that practitioners are expected to work within.

In the reforms, the concept of "professional autonomy" acts as a trope for framing the reforms within an intellectual programme that combines neoliberal and neoconservative traditions. It constructs a utopian, beautific narrative by promising to slash 'unnecessary bureaucracy and central prescription' (Gove 2011c) and to restore teachers with 'unprecedented freedom to teach' (Gibb 2016d). Curriculum and pedagogy are bound together in this discourse: the 'core body of knowledge' provided in the national curriculum is 'designed to maximise pupil understanding and minimise confusion, giving teachers professional autonomy over how to teach' (DfE 2016, 89). The vision of "professional autonomy" is also tied to a technical understanding of bureaucracy and accountability in schools. Most importantly, this prioritises quantitative forms of assessment by insisting that schools collect more data about pupil progress, as well as becoming part of a constellation of data points for establishing "what works".

In the final section of my literature review, throughout *Chapter Three* and in parts of my other empirical chapters, I have argued that the Conservative reforms contain an ambitious intellectual programme about education that combines cultural conservative conceptions of defining the function of literature and culture, with a neoliberal focus on streamlined accountability systems for data management. Between Conservative ministers' evocations about a cultural education that can unleash Arnoldian 'sweetness and light' (Gibb 2015e) an Oakshottian inheritance (Gove 2009), and Michael Barber's policy science of 'deliverology', is a construction of concepts and ideas about the function and purpose of schooling. It promotes a reading of cultural literacy which encapsulates telling our island's history (perhaps all the more pertinent for our "national self-confidence" post-Brexit), with a neoliberalist system of management that supposedly keeps publicly run schools agile and competitive in the global world economy, as well as its pupils: the 'consequences of globalisation for those without qualifications are truly ugly' (Gove 2011c). It combines a view of teachers as the custodians of our culture, or the 'unacknowledged legislators of our world' (Gove 2013e) while constructing them within a programme of supported autonomy, using de-pedagogised teaching methods, and prioritising clean data, 'evidence' and 'what works', over experience, intuition and professional expertise.

3) **English is conceptualised by ministers such as Gove and Gibb as an important subject for encouraging an "anglicised" reading of Hirschian cultural literacy to emerge (which ties together a policy programme of social justice with notions of procedural social fairness and economic competitiveness).**

Ideas about the English curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment are constructed within a frame that combines ideas taken from the traditions of cultural conservatism and neoliberalism. This, in turn, attempts to bring English into a much more explicit mode, where

knowledge is defined as extrinsic to classroom dynamics, through prescriptive content and ideas of context-transcendent cultural literacy. English pedagogy is presumed to align itself to accommodate this, by drawing on the new evidence-based insights by provided cognitive psychology. As noted in *Chapter Three*, John Yandell is less sanguine and characterises its conception of knowledge as 'inert, fixed, stable – ready to be delivered, more like a sack of potatoes than a box of delights, to the next generations' (2017, 250). Moreover, this is all constituted within a broader rhetorical attempt to resist the supposedly "regressive" elements in teacher education, and institutions such as LEAs, unions, and established English groups such as NATE (Gove 2012g), and in effect to row back on the social democratic gains made as a result of the Post-War consensus (Yandell 2017, 247).

This analysis coming from research question one has fulfilled two functions in this thesis. Firstly, it stands alone as a piece of social theory informed by empirical work. It is clear that the reform under the Conservative governments has been significant in attempting to reorder the imaginary of schooling in terms of the role and function of subjects such as English, and teaching and learning. Within the demand that schools swap contemporary literature for the Romantics is an intervention about what 'good', effective teaching supposedly entails by sequencing a discussion of pedagogy and curriculum within a frame of professional autonomy. My analysis of policy ideas has gone some way to providing a language to start unpacking this further.

Secondly, it adds an *ideational* dimension to policy trajectory analysis. The focus on ideas in policy is important for theorising politicians and policymakers as developing a 'shared conceptual resource', which is an instantiation of 'ideology in action' (Finlayson and Martin 2008, 449). On the other hand, it was important to "characterise" the privileged version of the policy. Within the policy cycle, the *context of influence* and the *context of text production* can 'nest' inside the *context of*

practice (Ball 2009a). Therefore there are 'struggles or competing versions of policy' within the *context of practice*: there will be both a privileged version of policy text and a privileged version of enactment which leads to interpretations of interpretations, or tensions (Ball 2009a). The centrality of context foregrounds the importance of the materiality of policy work; however, the agency of teachers to interpret and recontextualise policy language and text is essential in putting policy ideas into practice.

Finally, appreciating that the ideational has an ongoing connection to the context of practice is also worth noting at a level of democratic practice. A refusal (though rare and not present in my study), or coordinated political action at the *context of practice*, can be subsumed back to the *context of influence*. The best example of this during the past three years has been the SATs boycott by parents and teachers, as well as the slowdown of primary schools converting to academies, though this may accelerate with the Conservative election victory 2020.

Enacting GCSE English Reform

2) How do practitioners interpret and translate the reforms in their institutional setting?

In constructing my policy trajectory, I wanted to move beyond the formal state apparatus and focus on the enactment of policy in an institutional setting. Through the processes of enacting reform, I wanted to know how English teachers articulated ideas about teaching and their subject. For Flyvbjerg, following Foucault, such an analysis consists of asking "how" questions (2001, 136–137). This approach by Flyvbjerg brings together questions of *understanding* and *explanation* in the form of narrative analysis. Tasked with enacting tenets of the 2013 reforms, I wanted to know and document *how* teachers "did" the work of policy (both implicitly and explicitly) through recontextualising

policy texts in their everyday practice. Such a task required drawing on 'thick' data and focusing first on specific practices, events and talk, before attempting to understand how these became part of discursive formations that 'speak to the wider social processes of schooling' such as the production of "the teacher"' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 16). The connection between enactment and documenting 'thought' (as in Mitchel Dean's (2010) use of the word) guided me in answering research question two, and developed in a number of statements and explanations:

1) **In enacting the reforms, practitioners construct their ideas about what it means to be an English teacher by working within their own institutional and professional contexts, as well as with reference to policy discourses.**

During my fieldwork, I found good evidence that teachers enact policy through self-interpretation and engagement with their local context(s), professional values and the particular ethos that their institution holds. As Ball has noted, enactment is a 'social and personal process', as well as a 'material process' (Ball 2009a). Broadly-speaking, this insight challenges the naivety of policymakers who envisage that policy enters 'the best of all possible schools', away from the messiness of internal institutional dynamics (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 3). Such a worldview provides 'little acknowledgement of variations in context in resources or in local capabilities' (Ball 2009a). In *Chapter Four*, I made a substantial effort to provide a context-rich picture of the environment that I was working in. I considered this as part of my analysis of policy. Later in my empirical chapters, these contexts appeared in the internal texture of the practices and "talk" that I report. They helped me to provide essential data for a better understanding of the reasons why teachers went about their practice as they did.

Throughout the year, it was clear that the decisions at *Lime Tree* were being negotiated within a matrix of material, situated and external

contexts, and this led to some convergences with, and divergences from, the policy goals set by the state. For instance, I was interested in why teachers at *Lime Tree* ended up standardising their curriculum over two years of enacting the reform, rather than expanding it in line with Conservative ministers' ambitions to bring more breadth to the English curriculum. Here, I analysed a collection of individual actions, conversations and practices leading up to this decision in line with emerging rationalities for explaining this process (Flyvbjerg 2001, 135). In the first instance, budgetary limitations meant that the department had to be pragmatic about what texts they selected. This in turn fed into what exam board they went with and their choice of two texts. Throughout the year, however, it was the constant pressures that were being applied by management, as well as the realities of time, resources and risk-aversion that led to an ever-increasing narrow curriculum.

The negotiation of policy priorities occurs in the *context of practice*. This principle holds for higher-level managerial decisions, but also classroom practices about how a text should be taught. Even if translation at a management level favours a privileged policy position, it still has to 'engage with other sorts of classroom priorities and values and compete for attention' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 46). A good example of this was the attempt by John's line manager who wanted to embrace a standardised curriculum so that English could be streamlined (*Chapter Four*). This direction was rejected by the head of the department based on the fact the text would be the one he would teach (Henry V) when most of the other teachers wanted to stick to teaching *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*. The rapid convergence towards standardisation towards the end of the year, however, demonstrated how quickly such thinking could change and how it can hinge on a single individual.

Chapter Five made the point that the classroom is usually the endpoint for policy interventions. Following Black and William (2010), I tried to

capture the idea that policymakers form interventions for classroom teaching (this makes it the sharp end of policy interventions), but they do so without awareness of social classroom dynamics. The English reforms have aimed to shape teachers' decisions about what content they choose and how they should go about teaching it. Policy thinking about curriculum and pedagogy are directed towards changing how teachers think and approach their teaching practice. This intervention, however, is susceptible to different iterations because teacher values and practitioner ownership of their classroom space can provide a critical buffer zone from overzealous demands. It is difficult to pin down the messy dynamics of a classroom, but it is clear that policy objectives can become tangentially altered as a result of competing priorities and contexts.

In this thesis, I identified some "softer" and "harder" conditions attached to the 2013 reforms. Politicians or policy actors attempting to promote teaching English through direct instruction, rather than child-centred approaches, is an example of a soft condition. Most teachers I met were resistant to this and continued to approach their lessons with a broadly child-centred approach. Amber and John, for instance, read education research blogs or referenced commercial books such as Doug Lamov's *Teach Like a Champion* (books that have been adopted by schools such as Michaela and appear consistently across education secretaries' speeches) (Gove 2013e; Morgan 2015a). The insights that practitioners gained from these books, however, formed a dialogic relationship with the department's ethos, and ended up proliferating scaffolding through visuals and pre-annotated poems. John also referred to reading David Didau's blog[61] as a reflection tool, and a possible form of resistance against overzealous school-based reformers. As I noted, new buzzwords "growth mindset" (Carol Dweck) and John

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[61] David Didau has written several books and become a prominent blogger on policy, practice and the use of evidence in teaching over the past ten years.

Hattie's *Visible Learning* connected to "progressive" initiatives at *Lime Tree*, such as the *Building Learning Power* movement that emphasised skills, child-centeredness, perseverance grids and creativity.

Because it has played a central role in the reforms, the concept of cultural literacy was significant, although almost none of the teachers referred to it explicitly. "Cultural literacy" as a concept was analysable within a full range of practices that included practices outside of the English classroom, as well as within it. For instance, this school interpreted participating in the poetry-by-heart competition in more technical, instrumentalist terms: almost as a function of getting a request done from senior leadership, rather than as trying to embed it in the curriculum or the academic fabric of the school. As the teacher noted, extra-curricular projects such as the Poetry by Heart would probably 'be a distraction' to those doing their GCSEs' (Annabelle, English teacher). It was clear that teachers considered knowledge as part of an overall teaching context. In large part, this was due to the demands of the GCSE assessment itself, which as discussed in *Chapter Five* necessitates a form of practical criticism that is better suited to a situated cultural literacy rather than the government's more static context-transcendent variety (J. Gordon 2018). Assessment criteria can be considered a "hard" and non-negotiable demand, given that teachers must work to train the pupils for a standard test (3).

2. The processes of *doing* policy bring forward active "subjects" who become enmeshed in the workings of liberal governance. In enacting reform, teachers draw on their creativity and agency as well as being enmeshed with the core discourses that organise English schooling.

Schools are 'productive of, and constituted by discursive practices, events and texts' that order actions, understandings and praxis (Maguire, Hoskins, et al. 2011, 597; Colebatch 2009). In my literature review, I pointed to the "master" discourses organising twenty-first

century English schooling, which we can understand in terms of performativity and standards (see Ball 2003; Holloway and Brass 2017), and behaviour policy (Maguire, Ball, and Braun 2010), as well as interventions by policymakers on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Within the policy language also, I noted the "conspicuous" concept of *autonomy*, which has been employed loosely by politicians to signify an ambition that the management of 'day to day learning is devolved' to schools and teachers (Gove 2011a), but in practice is connected to discourses of 'performance', political neutrality, and only explicitly realisable through governmental techniques such as data management.

Across the elements of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, each chapter empirically tracked divergences and convergences, resolution of, or struggles with, contradictory expectations or requirements, as a result of the enactment process and role of context(s) (Ball 2009a). In turn, this provided insights about how policy enactment is imbued with questions of power; interpretation and translation work 'enrol[s] or hail[s] subjects and inscribe[s] discourse into practices' (Ball et al. 2011, 621). Such a process identifies the 'allocation of posts of responsibility and the allocation of resources' (621). It was possible to see this work at certain moments at *Lime Tree*, in terms of how particular teachers approached the task of data or standardising the curriculum.

The increasing rate of reform over the past two decades has given rise to ever-increasing pragmatism that teachers take to both their practice and subject philosophies (Moore et al. 2002). The Conservative reforms, I argue, have intensified this further by instilling conversations around pedagogy and curriculum within the policy language of "professional autonomy". The concern this raises for schools and English teachers, in particular, draws practitioners towards pragmatic decisions, where the "autonomy" they receive from the state is conditional and stultified by the discourses of standards and performativity. Bethan Marshall in her

work on developing the different "philosophies" of English teaching describes pragmatists as those who have become accustomed to the "self-surveillance" and 'new management culture' in schools (Marshall 2000, 62) and take a more pragmatic approach to disagreement with policy. Reflecting on Marshall's typology two decades on, I do not believe it possible to claim that pragmatists are a distinct category of English teacher. At least from the view at *Lime Tree,* more or less every [English] teacher is a pragmatist nowadays. Pragmatism is a constant position (though it oscillates on a spectrum) in a high-stakes schooling environment. Negotiating the pragmatic mindset is the plane on which the advanced liberal techniques shape subjectivities and foster responsibilisation.

Moore et al. distinguish between *principled pragmatism* and *contingent pragmatism. Principled* pragmatism refers to a teacher making their own 'informed evaluations of and choices from a range of possibilities' and believing that there are choices that can still be made (Moore et al. 2002, 557). In this sense, choosing to adopt government initiatives is 'out of genuine agreement' with those initiatives; a disagreement with a policy is unlikely to lead to them feeling uncomfortable because they feel the reforms will allow them to affirm their pedagogic identities by drawing on the range of practices and traditions (557). *Contingent* pragmatism refers to the change in emphasis teachers made by referring more to the 'stories behind their compromises rather than on the reasons for their educational choices' (557). Those that believe their choices are overly constrained are described as contingently pragmatic—displaying a 'resistance of the mind' that can no longer be able to be 'translated into meaningful action' at school, classroom or at the national policy level. At *Lime Tree,* teachers mostly referred to *principled pragmatism,* where there was a decision to adopt certain interventions, especially when it came to their pedagogy. This was mostly a department that felt there were opportunities in the reform to

develop their schemes of work and develop professionally. More broadly, individual teachers seemed willing to accept the changes to their subject even when the system potentially squeezed out the "softer" aspects, such as cultural analysis, or what Neil described as his 'idealistic' views of the subject (Neil, English teacher).

The reforms created antagonisms between practice and values. I described in *Chapter Five* how, though, many teachers at *Lime Tree* were unsure about the motives behind the government's proposals around the linear examination, they still prepared their pupils by devoting a lot of lesson time towards exam technique nonetheless. Annabelle's comments towards the end of my fieldwork were telling when she discussed her decision to make the department teach just one text. It was the 'fictional element' that drew her to English and the ability to 'explore morals' and 'cultural diversity' (Annabelle, new Head of English). The hard reality and pressures of explaining the impact of the reforms with parents or delivering lessons for absent colleagues, meant that it was no longer possible to work without 'boundaries', 'structure' and 'consistency[62]'... 'even if not every teacher enjoys that set text' (Annabelle, new Head of English). The responsibility of "delivering" reform and ensuring that the changes do not adversely affect pupils is a powerful driver for teachers to move towards the path-dependency of standardisation.

Ball et al. make the distinction between disciplinary policies such as standards that 'produce a primarily passive policy subject' and *writerly* policies that 'offer a plurality of entrances' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 94). English reform allows teachers more than a binary choice between acceptance or rejection. Where the working of power is most effective, is in the moments in which deep interpretation of what reform

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[62] This mostly referred to the fact the odd teacher had deviated from the two texts set by the department. Neil had taught Pride and Prejudice and John was teaching Henry V.

means for practice comes into contact with the broader discourses of schooling. *Chapter Three* drew on foundational sociological categories (Boltanski and Thevenot 2006) to make the point that actors often navigate their understanding of the world within competing views. It is possible to make the point (without reducing fluid actions to categories) that the English teachers I met worked with an ethos of student-centred learning, valuing texts in ways that contradicted the Conservative government's view though still within the dominant accountability framework. Wright's summation is that teachers adopt the 'regime of self-criticism, self-discipline and self-assessment in order to keep external forces of control at arm's length' (A. Wright 2012, 291). As such, the practices of 'setting their own targets' or 'managing themselves', as opposed to those set by a cumbersome central government, provides a certain feeling of empowerment (291). This logic was evident in the various ways that teachers at *Lime Tree* tried to find ways to evidence constant progress, streamline pedagogy, curriculum and assessment through PiXL or reducing the variety of texts taught.

Governmental techniques such as data management and accountability focus teachers' sense of their roles. These practices are negotiated and often rejected, at least in small acts of defiance or in conversation, but when it comes to department strategy or accountability, the stronger impulses towards standardisation and performance are powerful organisers for action. The intensification of using measurable impact for judging classroom interventions acts as an individualising form of accountability that forms part of what Foucault has referred to as the 'production of truth—the truth of the individual himself' (1982, 783).

The Fate of the Reforms

Reflecting on the answers to questions one and two, what can be said about the "fate" of the English reforms?

'Too often social scientists... forget that policies once enacted, restructure subsequent political processes'
(Skocpol cited Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 8)

Research question three responds to the findings of my first two questions, in making a judgement about how the reform has played out in an institutional and practice-based context. Previously, I have tried to show how the policy process is subject to contestation and recontextualisation which can lead to divergences and convergences of key policy goals. Enactment allows one to pay attention to the creative way that practitioners working within institutions and classrooms can put their stamp on policy "texts", albeit 'limited by the possibilities of discourse' (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 3). My argument is that this movement between actor agency and discourse has analytical validity and explanatory substance for my reading of 2013 English GCSE reforms. It recognises a balancing act for teachers who are compelled to enact policy as actors and subjects but within strictures and existing terrain set for them. Enactment research seems well-equipped to capture the ever-evolving political processes present in schooling structures, as they arise at different moments in policy enactments. The participant approach, in particular, captures these functions in more significant events in the school calendar, as well as in mundane acts. In my view, the tension between teacher agency and broader discourses leads to convergences and divergences from state objectives and policy goals. The result of these tensions is one data point for considering the "fate" of the English reforms. However, before addressing convergences and divergences and their implications for English reform, it is worth reiterating what the Conservative party wanted to achieve with their reforms.

What did the Tories aim to achieve?

In his speech to the *Royal Society of Arts* in 2009, while the Conservatives were still in opposition, Michael Gove articulated a series of principles underpinning his vision for twenty-first-century conservative education. These oscillated between a liberal vision of education, cultural conservatism and neoliberalism. He begins with Arnoldian "sweetness and light": education as 'a good in itself' and a 'central hallmark of civilised society' (Gove 2009). Following this, we have the cultural conservatism: 'every human being is born heir to an inheritance' (Gove 2009). According to Oakeshott (and Gove), this inheritance is made up of 'beliefs', 'intellectual and practical enterprises', as well as 'canons and works of art' (Oakeshott quoted in Gove 2009). Next, Gove articulates a brand of neoliberalism. This neoliberalism refers to the central role of data and parental choice as a way of improving schooling standards. Labour had presided over the 'target culture' leading too much 'up towards the minister — not down towards the parents': a situation leading to bureaucracies and establishments 'thwarting the common sense of the people' (Gove 2009). Innovation and improvement would be unlocked with a combination of 'parental choice, pluralism of supply, [and] a diversity of schools with different ways of harnessing talent and resources' (Gove 2009).

As the past decade has played out, it has been possible to reread this speech, with some of the gaps filled in. The academy and free schools programme has enlarged. 68.8% of secondary pupils and 24.3% of primary children are taught in academies (Roberts 2017). Over two thirds (65%) of these academies are run by Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) (Gee, Worth, and Sims 2017). 87% of all schools are buying into services previously offered by the Local Authority (Gee, Worth, and Sims 2017). 55% have changed their curriculum (Gee, Worth, and Sims 2017). The process has seen traditional partners being side-lined in the

education process. There was evidence of this in John's comments that the LEA advice centre had been cut down to a 'skeleton core you can buy into' (John, head of English). The same is evident for initial teacher training courses. Over 50% of teachers are now trained by the school-led provision, in comparison to 2014, when this was 26% (Nye 2014). Moreover, the Conservative reforms have prioritised curriculum and assessment reform. I have outlined the changes to 2013 English GCSE, with a greater focus being put on "literary" texts from the 19th century. More "rigorous", linear exams have also taken over coursework. On the area of pedagogy, the Conservatives have been strategic in prioritising funding for projects such as phonetics and the EEF toolkit.

To a certain extent, this thesis has benefitted from taking Gibb and Gove at "face value", at least in order to develop data points for better understanding the reforms through the eyes of policymakers, as we need to 'pass through the self-interpretation of social actors involved in the regime and practices under investigation' (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 139). The function of developing programmes for reform relies on political actors, both modifying traditions and migrating across traditions (Bevir 2002, 197). On the surface, the government has managed to change some of the core structural components of English schooling, including changes to provision and curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. However, as I will point out, this is not so simple. Studying convergences and divergences formed at an institutional level can provide a fuller picture of how successfully the Gove vision has been in reordering ideas about teaching and English in practice.

On the one hand, even a decade into Conservative Party attempts to intervene into the space of education, teachers still retain a democratic impulse and agency to reject the most "extreme" elements of reform on teaching approach and text. Teachers retain a sense of ownership over their teaching in their classrooms and because policy aims are enacted within external and intrinsic contexts. The other problematic is a

divergence from policy aims by way of convergence. That is, teachers have moved towards a policy regime (of data, standards and accountability) that predates (but has been intensified by) the Conservative reforms, and this has squeezed out the Arnoldian, overtures of ministers such as Gove and Gibb.

Problematic divergences, or a space for resistance?

In the previous section, it is clear that significant changes have occurred to the space of education, encompassing the way schools are managed and how teachers are trained. My participant approach, however, has taken the English reforms as an entry point to understanding how the reforms have succeeded at the institutional level. Ultimately this is a focus on qualitative "indicators", such as their practices and talk, not quantitative. A school may have "changed" its curriculum, but inside that school softer policy ambitions can lead to 'positions of indifference and avoidance' by practitioners (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 49).

The Conservative education reforms have attempted to change the content and culture of English schooling, and it is this I have been most interested in documenting with regards to school English. A central component of reforms is the notion of cultural literacy, derived from Hirsch and Anglicised by Conservative ministers (as discussed in *Chapter Three*). I have already noted that most teachers in *Lime Tree* did not refer to cultural literacy in the way it appears in Conservative ministers' speeches. Documenting the teacher's use of knowledge and understanding of curriculum and pedagogy in their practice was a worthwhile exercise. *Chapter Four* pointed to the fact that teachers considered text selection and curriculum design through a fairly concrete and pragmatic lens. *Chapter Five* tracked the classroom choices of teachers and pointed to how teacher enacted teaching knowledge and cultural literacy through learning objectives such as providing access for children to comment on the text, to share their enjoyment of literature, as well as working within GCSE framework of

'unseen assessments that do not countenance background knowledge as a factor in response' (J. Gordon 2018, 32).

As opposed to the crude characterisation of separation between knowledge vs skills, or "progressive vs traditionalist", most teachers at *Lime Tree* sought to utilise nuance in their teaching by drawing on the background knowledge of their pupils. When this came to poetry, teachers such as Hannah focused on bringing the broad themes of Romanticism to bear on pupils' understanding of the seasons, eliciting personal responses and meaning-making. Her view was that simply compiling a list of facts about Wordsworth would not adequately set pupils up for their examinations. As Gordon's (2018) work suggests cultural literacy is not a 'quantifiable commodity'; teachers need to be aware that 'its extent and expression differs across classrooms, communities and countries' (23).

Amongst teachers, there was an appreciation of literary heritage, although this varied. In *Chapter Five,* I pointed to the fact that teachers felt comfortable with references to popular culture, or folk traditions even if they were not formally present in the GCSE syllabus. Even within one department, throughout several interviews and months of fieldwork, it was possible to see different policy directions by members of staff. The department consisted of teachers from different generations who hold 'different dispositions' and 'set within different waves of innovation and change' (6). John, starting his teaching career in 1994, was the only teacher to have taught the GCSE as full coursework. Some others had experienced iterations and curriculum reform under New Labour when controlled assessment had been introduced alongside the end of year examinations. This 'field of memory' (Foucault 2002) nourishes policy interpretation with richness, variety and some unpredictability for practice. One newer teacher (starting her career in 2012/13) taught several poems from the AQA *Different Tongues* anthology brought in under New Labour, in order to

introduce the unseen poetry component. At points, we had further informal conversations about memories of ourselves as pupils being taught this anthology at school. John Agard's *Half-Caste* or Moniza Alvi's *Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan* had given us something that Norfolk, (with its demographic homogeneity), could not provide outside of the English classroom.

Problematic convergences, or deeper state logics

During my fieldwork, I spent time considering the relationship of power within the process of enacting reforms. As Ball et al. have suggested, policy enactment draws policy subjects to get 'caught up in the marvellous machinery of policy' (2012, 72). Teachers became part of this "machinery" through their engagements, discussing and planning the priorities of the department (*Chapter Four*), shaping their lessons to accommodate the realities of their classroom dynamics and external factors, such as the design of the GCSE course (*Chapter Five),* as well as the ever-increasing role of data on tracking pupil progress (and their own) (*Chapter Six).* The power relations embedded in reform comes from its ability to prompt self-work by policy-subjects. Such work can orient them towards becoming 'moralised and "responsiblised" individuals (J. Clarke 2005). Throughout my empirical work, it is possible to point events and practices that, are conducive to the current managerial regime but seemingly contradict other ambitions in the Conservative programme. The clearest example of this was the decision to reduce the number of texts being taught to one in order to allow staff to focus on improving their systems and consistency across the department.

Part of the neoliberal logic is to delegate this form of decision making to institutions and teachers themselves and to embed it within their practices. At the 2018 Conservative Party conference, during a fringe event, Damian Hinds, the current Education Secretary, responded to the concerns about the vast amounts of data schools were collecting.

He shrugged his shoulders and "empathised" by admitting this was one of the most pressing challenges for teacher overwork, but that these systems had maintained 'a momentum of their own' and that there was nothing the government could do about it (Hinds quoted in George 2018). Despite the intentions of the government to 'remove the shackles' from teachers, the dominant organising discourses of standards and performativity have continued to maintain their grip on institutional "thought". It also points to an asymmetry in the expectations about what is supposedly achievable at different levels in the policy chain. It would be inconceivable for a teacher to shrug off a demand to submit their data to leadership on time or for a school to not fulfil its legal obligation to report to Ofsted.

I have previously drawn on Stephen Gorard's research suggesting that it is hard to determine whether policy affects real change; instead, it is perhaps better understood as an 'epiphenomena providing a legislated basis for what already exists' that formalises ongoing changes (Gorard 2006, 19). Problematic convergences (such as the one Hinds mentions) characterise the forces and discourses shaping practices and 'thought' within schooling infrastructures that policymakers and politicians cannot capture in the abstract. In the end, such a fact points to politicians not really so bothered with detail of institutional enactment and leaves it unclear as to whether the ambition, quantity and aggressiveness of the reform changes, pursued by Gove was an attempt to see what might stick or break. As Gibb noted recently, it takes a lot of energy 'to do more to break up the cement of the ways things had been done since the 1960s' (Gibb 2018). For instance, *Lime Tree's* teachers did not pro-actively respond to policy ambitions and discussion around curriculum and pedagogy (Hirsch etc.).

I have noted earlier that I was interested in why teachers at *Lime Tree* ended up standardising their curriculum throughout two years of enacting the reform, given that there had been opposition to this policy.

Nick Gibb has lamented 'timeless literature, scientific wonders, of great historical events being relegated to the backseat' so that 'joyless skills and processes [could] come to the fore' (Gibb 2016d). A key reform ambition was to increase the number of texts offered to children: a curriculum reform that removed the 'strict diet of Steinbeck' and replaced it with Orwell, Austen and Bronte (Gibb 2016d). Schools should work towards 'asserting the importance of liberal learning' (Gove 2009).

Following the reform, my fieldwork identified a combination of line management pressure, the everyday realities of exam pressure, and limited time and resources that resulted in *Lime Tree* narrowing the range of texts they taught across their GCSE qualification, not increasing it. These forces combined have led to teachers having to navigate an educational terrain of managerialism, as well as being 'the critical guardians of the intellectual life of our nation' (Gove 2013e). At *Lime Tree*, these ambitions seemed at odds with one another given that teachers felt the curriculum to be prescriptive or simply 'some romantic notion of this literary canon' (Philip, English teacher); in fact, delivering a tight GCSE syllabus offered no 'curriculum freedom at all' (John, head of English). If we accept Gibb and Gove's desire for more vibrant liberal education to emerge from the Conservative's reforms, then we must consider them as either naive about what is actually occurring at the deeper level of the state, or recognise that they are drawing on a rhetoric that is attempting to reorder the structural and cultural elements in English schooling.

This reorganisation of professionalism within the frame of "professional autonomy" seeks to substitute political contest and debate for a neutral logic of decision-making (market-like in its calculations) (Janet Newman and Clarke 2018, 42). It is a logic that is moving down to the system to the individual teacher. Such measures, which limit teacher

agency and restrict plural definitions of professionalism[63] connect with ideas penned by Dominic Cummings (Gove's special advisor when he was education secretary and most recently the lead coordinator of Leave.EU campaign). For him, the "problem" facing policy-makers is what to do with the "tens of thousands of roughly averagely talented' teachers in our schools, rather than thinking that England will be blessed with 'a quarter of a million 'brilliant' teachers" (Cummings 2013, 81). These comments were made in an essay he wrote after he left the DfE in 2013:

> *While heads need to be flexible enough to allow talented people to experiment, we also need schools in chains that spread proven approaches (and '90% solutions') without relying on innovation, inspiration, and talent. 'Direct Instruction' (DI), in which teachers follow tightly constrained rules to deliver lessons, is generally ignored in English education debates despite its proven effectiveness in randomised control trials around the world. However, standards might improve substantially if thousands of roughly averagely talented teachers simply used DI instead of reinventing square wheels. It will also be possible for teachers to learn alongside pupils using MOOCs.*

> (Cummings 2013, 81)

The 2016 white paper points to the National Curriculum format as one that can 'maximise pupil understanding and minimise confusion', in order to give teachers 'professional autonomy over how to teach' (89). Cummings is less sanguine about the movement and articulates it as more about damage limitation and utilising forms of knowledge such as randomised controlled testing, rather than local forms of knowledge that teachers have built up through the experience of their practice. Most of the teachers at *Lime Tree* had taught long enough to draw on

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[63] Gewitz et al (2009) make the point that professionalism should simultaneously studied as both a 'concern about standards and ethics and 'doing one's job well', and as 'a legitimatises discourse that reproduces particular forms of (classed, 'raced' and gendered) identity, power and in/exclusion (4). Understanding how government tries to construct a notion of professionalism (whether through teacher standards or evaluation), ultimately reproduces discourse that is embedded in teacher identities; it is both a 'mode of social coordination and as shorthand for a (shifting and contested set of occupational virtues' (4).

other knowledges available to them (some mentioned their teacher training, others talked about previous iterations of the National Curriculum). Ball et al., however, point out that newly qualified teachers are the most likely to "exhibit policy dependency and high levels of compliance' (2012, 63). It is therefore plausible to suggest that these reform discourses will likely be most potent in shaping the subjectivities of a new generation of teachers who have trained in particular schooling environments.

Such a thought makes us consider that the Conservative programme is not 'uncompromisingly radical' as Gove would have it (Gove 2013a) but rather one that has simply followed the trend of the past twenty years. Michael Apple noted in 2009 the emergence of a new hegemonic bloc combining with the three elements of privatisation (the neoliberals), those who wish to return to 'discipline, tradition, and real culture', (the neo-conservatives) and the managerial middle class 'deeply committed to audit cultures' (Apple 2009, xiv). Finlayson has pointed to synergies in the Brexit movement between elite individuals (including Cummings) heralding the post-bureaucratic age (where a belief in large scale data or "what works" replaces other forms of local knowledge in shaping the conduct of governing individuals), and the popular rabble of ethnic nationalism clearly visible in some Brexit voters' anxiety about the loss of white tradition (2017). In this light, such a programme for schooling seems compatible with Gove's belief that teachers must rely on 'scientifically-robust data' to improve pedagogy (Gove 2010a), distribute data differently to encourage 'direct accountability' (DfE 2010a, 66), as well as fostering a concern that children learn our island's story (Gove 2010b). The Gove programme is itself the uncompromising hegemonic bloc that Apple identifies.

As mentioned, throughout his time as Secretary of State, Gove posited the concept of cultural capital through an Oakeshottian argument of 'rights to that inheritance' (2009). It might be easy to configure this

articulation of cultural capital as one of traditional cultural conservatism (a concern of moral decay). Configured within a broader programme for co-opting the language of the opposition, however, Gove's conservatism 'is less concerned with holding on to a vanishing past, than with mobilising to seize the future' (Jones 2013, 330). This way of thinking understands the reforms as counter-revolutionary, absorbing the 'ideas and tactics of the very revolution or reform that it opposes' (33). A chain of equivalence is posited by Gove when he writes that these reforms are going to save the ordinary hardworking teachers from the blob (Gove 2013b).

Moreover, it re-appropriates the language of the Left regarding equality and removes it from its progressive contexts (achieved through Post-War legislation) and resituates it within a conservative frame: 'co-opting the language of their opponents', as Yandell puts it (2017, 287). This is the frame of the status quo, given that educational attainment and social mobility are conceived as procedural fairness. Gove wants the curriculum to reinvigorate the 'intellectual improvement that existed among working people' (2013a). Corey Robin in his book on conservatism captures the tactic as the 'reconfiguration of the old and absorption of the new', including the ideas and tactics of the reform it opposes[64] (2018, 40).

The core tenet of the Conservative reforms has been the attempt to argue that "progressivism" in teaching has worsened the educational chances of disadvantaged pupils. Gove has referred to the 'soft bigotry of low expectations' to characterise research that makes the point that poorer pupils struggle at school because of socio-economic factors

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[64] According to Robin, the early voices of the French revolution produce a 'surprising admiration for the very revolution they are writing against' (45). This might explain Gove's supposed admiration for Gramsci; it also offers an explanation for his recent comments about Momentum after the 2017 election, that the Conservatives could learn from their campaign tactics (Landin 2017).

(Gove 2012e; Gove 2013g). Instead, it is educational conservatism (theorised with knowledge-based pedagogies and context-transcendent cultural literacy), that can lead to newly empowered children and progressive ends (Gove 2013a). I noted that this appeal speaks to practitioners through the language of pedagogy and curriculum, as well as drawing on their motivation to do the best for their pupils.

In many respects, this offers support to the notion that reform works discursively by reordering the space of teaching. As Ball et al. note, teaching is situated 'within policy regimes and policy discourses which speak to teachers as practitioners — at least to an extent — through the language of curriculum and pedagogy and the subjective possibilities the knowledge and learning in policies make possible' (2012, 7). Such a process is not instant, in which case we must return to the Skocpol's warning that social scientists should not forget that political structures can change once policy has been introduced. It is also possible that the logical conclusions of a government programme will be more fully realised later down the line, or that policy regimes not fully anticipated by the government will lead to divergences and convergences evident in the everyday practices of practitioners. Nick Gibb has paid particular attention to PGCE students (2017a); if social researchers want to understand how new discourses of professionalism are playing out on the ground over the next few years, so must we.

The Contribution of *this* Trajectory Analysis

Ultimately this thesis has combined conceptual and material tools, drawn from social, political and education theory, to develop a policy trajectory analysis of the 2013 reforms to GCSE English. Its central ambition has been to analyse the enactment of the reforms, as they have been recontextualised within a single secondary school. In so doing, this has built on previous work in enactment research (Braun, Maguire, and Ball 2010; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012), by focusing on reform interventions across the domains of curriculum, pedagogy and

assessment. These previous studies have drawn on case-study work, but I have attempted to reflect more fully on the use of participant, in-depth data for capturing practices and events, as well as talk and artefacts. More specifically, the study has moved beyond interview data and utilised spaces such as the staff room and the classroom to document how policy enactment occurs within the different moments of practice.

I argue that this focus on praxis in the classroom has allowed me to develop a problem-led approach to the case of school English reform. Problem-led research focuses itself around how problems "emerge" out of the way social actors speak and act (Bacchi, 2012a). The design of my trajectory study has allowed for critical analysis of the way concepts such as teaching and "the teacher" are considered at the state level, as well as how practitioners act out these concepts at an institutional level. The result is a complex picture of divergences and convergences where the policy discourses are contextualised within practitioner practices, values and external contexts.

Policy trajectory studies come in different shapes and sizes: this thesis might have taken a different direction. A researcher more concerned about "making sense" of the state's vision of education may have focused solely on the *context of influence*. Somebody more interested in developing enactment theory, or practitioners' experience of enacting "English on the ground" could have just summarised Gove's speeches in the literature review. Instead, I have positioned myself between the fields of British political studies and education policy sociology because I think there is a great benefit in articulating a case across a number of contexts. The sum of concepts, tools, theories and empirical data brings forward a bespoke and original "case", though its principles might be developed for other policies and subjects where the researcher thinks there is value in studying the movement and articulation of policy across different policy contexts. I have become increasingly interested in bringing together concepts from politics, sociology and critical

education policy to analyse different "moments" in a policy's life. This approach has the advantage of picking up on emerging social and political trends in education, and to analyse their concrete effects on the ground.

Moreover, it is my view that focusing on policy discourse at one cross-sectional level misses out vital insights into why and how policy works or fails. Following Trevor Gale, I believe that policy discourses do not 'simply assign meanings to texts in isolation but weave them together to form contexts' (Gale 1999, 399). Through argumentation and policy text, politicians and policymakers try to (albeit often unsuccessfully) comprehend the institutional uptake of their policies. School-based policy work also takes 'its meaning from its relationship—its relative positioning and emphasis—with other texts (its context) and from how these are discursively 'storied' (399). As a researcher, being able to map out how some state-level policy texts and concepts at the *Lime Tree* were 'prioritised' and 'emphasised', whilst others were ignored, was a result of taking both of these contexts seriously enough to devote serious analytical work towards them both.

In designing my trajectory across multiple contexts, I felt I would get a fuller picture and more analytical precision about why divergences and convergences occurred by being able to link this back to the "self-interpretations" of both politicians and practitioners. This thesis posits politics and policy as a mobile and interactive activity by contextualising the broader work of "policy text" and "policy discourse" within political traditions, argumentation and on the ground enactment. Political and fantasmatic logics can be powerfully seductive, and there is some evidence that within their current situation, teachers are prepared to absorb policy practices such as data management, though they remain sceptical. The connection of school English with data practices was a good example of this—data practices increased, but many teachers at *Lime Tree* were unsure of their value.

In particular, I tried to show why *distance* and *difference* often matter when it comes to policymaking. For example, this thesis captures the importance of *meaning* in a way that normative policy analyses often struggle to achieve when they focus on input and output. Although this thesis has referred to the notion of "making sense" of the policy reforms since the Conservative government, in truth, many of the reform goals are contradictory as shown through the way practitioners find it difficult to enact them coherently. This tension was particularly prominent in the way *Lime Tree* moved towards an increasingly standardised curriculum, despite many practitioners wanting to develop broader texts to study. This is not "sabotage" or the "enacted curriculum" (as Joe Kirby would describe it), given how I have referred to the way teachers at *Lime Tree* regularly worked within a pragmatic frame. The reforms desire classrooms to be creative spaces whilst also wanting teachers to doggedly follow findings from randomised controlled trials and the law of science. Policymakers want to empower teachers as professionals whilst at the same time asking them to follow what the knowledge dictates. In short, "reality" encompasses dealing with contradictions in policy discourse as well as the actual day-to-day reality (and challenges) that working in a school can bring.

7.2 Limitations of the Research

It would be rare to find a researcher who felt they managed to do complete justice to their case study and participants. To *completely* track teachers and observe how they enacted the curriculum across their classroom teaching, discussions during meetings and planning would have required a level immersion that was not possible. There were restrictions on the amount of time I was able to spend at my case study school, and also the time teachers could give me. It became clear that a lot of interpretation and translation is done alone, at home, or in practices that teachers themselves may not even consider "enactment". Throughout the school year, I was able to witness a range of events. I

participated in 117 lessons across 70 days in the academic year, spoke to everybody in the department (at least enough to take fieldnotes), and I picked up artefactual evidence of policy interpretation and translation. Moreover, as I have mentioned previously, the fact I had worked with many of those at *Lime Tree* before allowed me a level of familiarity that resulted in candid interviews.

Reflecting on how I developed my broad themes or solidified emerging ones, I have still relied on interview data for teachers to communicate how they went about practices that are hidden from the view of a researcher. In many ways, this is what makes interviews so attractive because fieldnotes by themselves are often fragmentary, and because I was not in the school every day, I felt some gaps might be efficiently filled in by getting teachers to report their enactments. With this said, documenting gaps or "untidiness" is still important. It mirrors the extent to which practitioners had to work through these reforms with often incomplete information: for instance, developing a school-led grading system with most of the grading boundaries missing from the government's policy documents or trying to second-guess what a GCSE literature model answer looks like because the exam board has failed to produce any themselves. This incoherence is the reality of reform enactment.

It is also important to acknowledge that this thesis is a specific case study bounded by its interest in English. This project diverged from work by Ball et al. by developing a trajectory for a specific school subject, but what of maths and science teachers who have also had to negotiate new reforms? There were also a great many themes I wanted to explore further but was not able to. For instance, the theme of behaviour came up a lot in my class with vocational pupils. I felt it essential to go into the classroom and observe teachers working, as well as being able to document their translations of policy, and this generated some fruitful directions to consider how teachers were

working through the new GCSE content. At the start of this project, I intended to draw on far more dialogue from pupils. A great deal of my 50,000 words of fieldnotes included conversations with pupils, but in terms of writing up my three fieldwork chapters, I decided to focus two chapters on the department and teachers, and only one on the classroom. I hope a contribution of this thesis will have been to demonstrate how enactment research can be used to develop a focused trajectory analysis.

7.3 Conclusion

By answering my three research questions, I have pointed out that state policy usually omits careful consideration of how the different reform tenets and their embedded discourses interact with one another at an institutional level. This leads to divergences in the classroom, and it can lead to "problematic convergences" and practices within a managerialist system that prioritises data and assessment. The Conservative government's attempt to force an agenda of "softer proposals" has been largely ignored at my case study school. In the *context of practice,* aggressive political tactics have done little to help to make some of the more nuanced aspects of the English reform such as the focus on "cultural literacy" and knowledge pedagogy "stick"[65].

Nick Gibb has since reflected on the "tension" between the DfE 'imposed curriculum' and trying to 'liberate teachers to enable them to do what they want, to respond to the demands of parents' (Gibb 2018). In his book on "knowledge and the future school", Michael Young refers to the curriculum as shorthand for 'defining the purpose of a school or (in relation to the National Curriculum) the school system of a country' (Young and Lambert 2014, 10). The Conservative's focus on curriculum

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[65] Though the populist argument accompanying the reforms has empowered some new key actors, and its effect has shaped the wider discourses in schooling. Tracking this empirically is outside the scope of this thesis.

(as knowledge and cultural literacy), has certainly been wedded to a particular articulation about the purpose and function of schooling in England and Wales. In a restrained, high stakes environment, however, Conservative ambitions for the curriculum have been emptied of their broader objectives. I tried to characterise the "Gove programme" in naming the social logics of *knowledge-dispersion*, *outcomes* and *responsibilisation*, and in my fieldwork chapters by showing how these logics converged or collided during interpretive policy work and in the everyday practices of practitioners.

In short, I have found that the "liberation" of teachers that Gibb talks about has been curtailed within a policy environment that promises to tear down old bureaucracies but actually controls the conduct of individuals through managed outputs. In my case study, this is often through practitioner engagement with current data and assessment practices. There are loftier ambitions articulated by teacher-researchers such as Daisy Christodoulou and Tom Bennett, and former policy advisers to Gove such as Sam Freedman and Dominic Cummings who see the role that data-driven, evidence-based feedback loops can play in informing pedagogic practices. Teachers must remove biases, and 'use meta-analyses and social media to be reasonably on top of the available data' (Freedman 2018). This way of doing teaching (or using evidence) make sense within a more extreme logic of "intelligent accountability", and embodies a broader programme that calls into question the traditional role of the profession as a gatekeeper of knowledge.

Developing sound and effective policy rests on designing it with teachers and contexts in mind. Such an approach can encompass different normative models and worldviews. One example is the one articulated by Cummings and Freedman that mostly tries to conceptualise the teacher as some technician (or more generously, "a scientist"), who masters the data and information in such a way as to make incremental progress and constant readjustment. Currently, the

trend of 'problem-solving' in education is underpinned by an assumption that the problem is unproblematically defined without context, and its solution provided by what Gemma Moss calls "useful knowledge". However, "useful knowledge" for policymakers may not be useful knowledge for practitioners once distance and context are taken into account (2016). Her study of literacy policy in England under successive governments pointed to the 'dislocations' and 'divisions of labour' that form the 'knowledge landscape' (927).

Moss's paper provokes researchers to think about their research in terms of the common good. Problem-solving must be accompanied by research that poses problems and 'brings forward new questions' too. As policy initiatives are embedded (or slide away), good research can test 'whether current assumptions about what education is for and the terms which a good education is, therefore, being constructed, hold' (Moss 2016, 941). Seeing how the rhetoric of "liberation for teachers" has intensified the performance and standards agenda, is problematic for those schools and teachers that feel trapped in path-dependency. For Moss, this means rebuilding from the 'bottom up' and reasserting what these 'dilemmas looking like on the ground' (939). Echoing Maguire et al. this thesis makes the central point that policymakers and politicians must think about the policy work 'within a framework of contingencies and materialities', that is, the role of context (buildings, budgets, staffing, intakes, etc.) in forming, framing and limiting interpretative and practical responses to policy' (2011, 582).

There are two good reasons for challenging the current move towards "useful knowledge". The first reason follows Moss's idea that we must scrutinise the ideas of today by paying attention to what is happening on the ground, in order to build from the bottom up again. This was built into my policy trajectory design, in a way that followed Bent Flyvbjerg's concept of *phronesis*. The second reason is to call into question the supposed neutrality of data and "useful knowledge". A

number of recent papers have argued that value-neutral social science is not "politically atheistic" (Standring 2017; Craske and Loschmann 2018) The political actors advocating the mechanistic, self-optimising technocratic solutions reliant on data, are part of a small highly ideological minority who oppose public service professionals, professionals and institutions that provide local checks and balances.

In their book on teacher education and the political, Clarke and Phelan (2017) make the point that education has been instrumentalised (in effect to make education about economic ends). Disagreement is 'limited to varying views as to the best means by which instrumental goals can be achieved', which in turn results in broader political discussions about the purpose of education being 'off-limit' (3). This is a profoundly depoliticising force that hides power structures that both impact the professionalism of teachers and skew policy goals.

Characterising this programme through critical scholarship points to the political agenda "underbelly" of many recent education reforms, but also their contingency. The attempt I have made in answering my research questions is one of characterising, intervention and demonstrating the contingency of such a programme. After all, as Biesta et al remind us, 'views about what education actually is, what is unique and distinctive about it, and even whether it can be characterised as an art or not, are far from settled' (2019, 1).

Conclusion

This thesis has provided an empirically-informed, problem-led basis for answering how the 2013 English reforms are comprehensible within a particular intellectual programme of government, as well as how its tenets, ambitions and priorities have played out in practice. In so doing, it has paid attention to the utility provided by the tools of enactment theory for engaging in a policy's enactment on the ground, by studying the events, practices and talk associated with it. There is an important connection between state policy ideas, interpretive work and translation enabled by the "technical" aspects of schooling infrastructures such as data practices, that can emerge as intended or unintended consequences of constellations of 'thought' and technologies. Without being prescriptive, this thesis posited an in-depth, context-dependent way of analysing a set of policy reforms.

The reforms, at times disparate and contradictory, have been held together by a master signifier of "professional autonomy". "Professional autonomy" entails a promise of freedom from experts and bureaucratic structures, whilst promoting an ideology of science organised by a "what works" agenda. According to politicians, school leaders and teachers can tap into de-contextualised meta-analyses studies, and rely less on previous networks and traditional knowledge structures, such as LEAs and universities, which are perceived to have progressive ideologies associated with them[66]. As I showed in research question one, it is clear that throughout the speeches made by Gibb and Gove, it was not enough to promote knowledge-based pedagogies; Conservative politicians actively evoked the "enemy" of so-called "progressivism", without which their reforms do not cohere. Glynos and Howarth's

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[66] We can see this also present in the academies and free schools programme, where changes to the middle governance of schools (school governors), has been repopulated by so-called "expert publics". These people are susceptible to market and business logics, rather than democratic representation (see Wilkins 2016).

Logics give us insights into the dynamics of this process—the establishment of chains of equivalence, or positing obstacles that speak to beautific and horrific narratives. These arguments have intended to save teachers and the profession from the clutches of people who subscribe to "progressivism" and child-centred teaching methods.

The central function of *knowledge* espoused by Gibb and the likes of Christodoulou (she regularly refers to knowledge as "facts" in her book *Seven Myths about Education* (2014)) has been criticised by (Yandell 2017) as being too static to capture the complexities of subject English. Metrics can be seductive and easily transportable to several schools but the role of reading age in determining appropriate reading material, for instance, would presumably (without context) remove the texts of William Blake or gloss over complex terms like Freud's ID or EGO, given their length. Knowledge as domain-specific is one useful measure, but it is not the only one. For a pupil to really "know" plot and character, requires the intertwinement of knowledge with experience. This is knowledge closer to the phenomenological kind: bringing together knowledge about plot and character and using it to reflect on the human experience. This mode of thinking is translated, albeit inadequately, through English examinations that take into account the pupil's personal response to the text. My fieldwork chapters, and answering research question two, tried to show that teachers understand this in a way that policymakers and politicians do not, through the way they spend time inviting pupils to create meaning from language, even when this impulse has been curtailed within the current policy environment. It might be possible to consider that whereas policymakers are often located in a logic of equivalence, involving antagonistic chains, practitioners are found in the logic of difference, which resists simplifying the organisation of a complex and messy social. For all the rhetoric about 'evidence', politicians and policymakers

are arguably the most ideologically-driven players in the overall policy field.

From an institutional viewpoint and one of practice, English seemed particularly fruitful for attempting an enactment study of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment policies. For instance, the notion of trying to make English conform to explicit knowledge-driven models is not so simple given that 'the meaning of English can lie as much in the curriculum as in pedagogy' (Kress et al. 2005, 4). This distinction is not quite clear given that the subject draws forth a multitude of 'possibilities of the fusion of (inter-)personal and of ideational meanings' (4). This tension played out in my fieldwork through the way teachers conveyed different interpretations of teaching the same literary text or poem with their classes, while the department (and school leadership) tried to find ways to streamline teaching and standardise the curriculum and lessons to fit the school's data systems.

Moreover, English is a particularly problematic subject for those that want to ossify [literary] knowledge as a concept. Articulating the boundaries of subject English as Standard English, or removing sexual politics (Gove 2011c) goes against the 'collective history of 'great literature being one not of conformity but of deviancy, change and challenge' (Belas and Hopkins 2019, 334). Oliver Belas and Neil Hopkins see an irony in Gove's admiration for writers such as Wordsworth and Whitman, despite the fact one 'finds slang, dialects, and vernaculars celebrated as sources of poetic richness and insight' in them (2019, 334). In many ways, this reinforces how the point that English as a subject is set in a contested centre: that from its origin it has 'employ[ed] the language of liberal possibility, whilst within our current policy frame, it espousing an invidious exclusionary and assimilationist politics' (2019, 320. Either way, it negates any attempt to confine English to "useful knowledge".

The Brexit Dividend?

When I started planning funding applications for this thesis in 2013-14, schools were being inundated with a raft of reforms by Michael Gove. Back from trips to Sweden, Gove pushed forward structural changes to school organisation (through the free schools and academy programme) and promoted evidence-based initiatives to increase teacher "autonomy". In 2015, E.D. Hirsch visited England to talk about cultural literacy, accompanying the introduction of the new National Curriculum for maintained schools. It would be difficult not to notice how the speeches have slowed down, and how the initiatives have quietened (though plenty of noise is still being made by organisations such as *ResearchED* and the "pioneers"). This reduction in activity may typical of a late-political cycle (though New Labour undertook a curriculum review as late as 2009), a more reserved Education Secretary, and undoubtedly some inertia created by Brexit.

Thinking about the policy cycle helps to remind us that schooling and 'the sequences in the curricula... are products of a particular moment in time, not general and immutable laws for how things must be' (Moss 2016, 329). When considering policy, we must run it alongside a number of assumptions that politicians share around ideology: the definition of education as a social good or 'the ideal size of the state' and how 'decision making responds to the pressures that develop over the policy cycle' (938). Many of these factors are contingent and unpredictable. Schools and their headteachers have warned about lack of money in the system; this call (at the time of writing) may be heeded by an outgoing Prime Minister trying to secure a legacy (Johnston 2019).

The distraction of politics at the moment has allowed the profession to take stock more broadly, and for the more honest conversation to happen. The current Chief Inspector of Ofsted Amanda Spielman has now made a number of speeches acknowledging material constraints such as strain that lack of funding brings, and workload pressures and

asserting that it would be Ofsted's focus to get back to the 'real substance of education: the curriculum' (Spielman 2019). In her 2017 address, she noted that it was difficult to schools that wanted 'to resist narrowing your curriculum or teaching to the test, when you see the school down the road doing it and getting the league table pay off, you may feel you have no choice but to follow suit' (Spielman 2017). This is, finally, an honest statement from a policymaker and sits in contrast to Nick Gibb's exasperation over schools that were not using lessons to 'spread the sheer enjoyment of reading' but instead demonstrating 'a premature obsession with exam technique'(Gibb, 2016c). Showing the reader how and why these logics play out (and why things go wrong) as they do, is a central part of this thesis. It can provide some foundation for articulating an accountability system that can lead to the 'development of a rich curriculum, rather than incentivising gaming[67]' (Spielman 2017).

From practitioners, there are lessons in this thesis about the nature of policy work regarding how experienced teachers often deal with what they perceive to be 'the consistent and repetitive cycles of policy change' (Sheikh and Bagley 2018, 55). These kinds of responses provide a zoomed-out picture of policy work as cyclical (with repackaged ideas) rather than any great transformation. For instance, John did draw on Robert Coe's work to suggest there had been grade inflation and argued that 'there was no doubt the GCSE needed to be overhauled', however, he was sceptical about how "new" these reforms were. Working through which exam board to go with, he mentioned about how having 'read one spec you've read them all... a slight difference in weighting of assessment objectives' (John, head of English). In *Chapter Four*, he talked about having *'gone back* to the idea of norm-referenced

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[T]hough we should remain cautious given that we have been here before. Bernard Barkers' (2010) *The Pendulum Swings* took on board Philip Blond's work with David Cameron in improving the accountability system. Reflecting ten years on, it would be an understatement to say Barker had been a little optimistic.

examinations' (John, head of English). The effect of this on senior colleagues is cynicism about the more nuanced and intellectual aspects of the reform debate given that they feel fatigued from previous interventions into their practices. The reality is that not much can *really* change, especially when external forces asymmetrically impact on teachers' time and thinking.

Emerging Trends and Future Research

The intertwinement of teachers as data creators as well as points within a constellation of other data points is potentially the start of a fundamental reorganisation of what it means to teach. In *Chapter Three*, I referred to Daisy Christodoulou's attempt to develop increasingly popular alternatives to traditional ways of assessing extended writing through "comparative judgement". Her website "no more marking" harbours an ambition to disseminate this data nationally to a database. This strategy goes further than utilising technology to make traditional assessment methods more efficient; it repositions the teacher's role as "gatekeeper", and makes them a knowledge-producer in relation to new technologies (Susskind and Susskind 2015, 102).

The programme of reforms has brought ideas such as cultural literacy and knowledge-dispersion into a common currency and empowered new key actors, including Daisy Christodoulou and Tom Bennett, and has promoted new forms of knowledge about curriculum and pedagogy. This thesis developed a trajectory that could problematise the state's intervention into English teaching, but policy mobilities spread wide. In future research, there is more work to be done in order to map this network of knowledges and actors more thoroughly, even if] such a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis. Developing a *network ethnography* (see Ball 2016b) potentially provides a fruitful way for tracking this combination of people, discourses and resources, over space and time. This study is important because it signals a meaningful change not only in the content of ideas about what a '21st-century

teacher' looks like but also to the *forms* in which knowledge about initial teacher development is disseminated, who creates it, evaluates it and controls it. All of this is changing what we think expertise looks like and where "embodied authority" about teacher professionalism lies (see Janet Newman and Clarke 2018).

We might also consider the role that education research might play in both identifying processes that normative policy analysis fails to achieve (and by implication, policymakers and politicians who rely on outcome-based evaluations). If we return to Damian Hind's "dilemma" that although the government has identified variables for teacher burnout, but cannot do much about it, then perhaps it is time for a different type of policy analysis to explore the deeper power dynamics that organise schooling. If we find some ambitions by ministers contradicted by the current discourses organising schooling, then there are "unintended consequences" that even ministers find it difficult to imagine. Our aim must be to go beyond implementation and draw attention to how the current regime closes down our ability to consider a more comprehensive view of teaching and against the prevailing tide for education research to "produce something". This is typified in the move toward standardisation and the idea that the 'same inputs will invariably lead to the same outputs' needs critical attention (Moss 2016, 942).

One of the more influential teacher-researcher to emerge from the re-privileging of new actors since 2010 is Tom Bennett. In his book, Bennett (2013) draws attention to the dishonesty of social researchers, who in creating their 'flow diagrams and learning bicycles' think they have determined 'predictive, explanatory efficacy, when all they have is an opinion, a hunch, demonstrated in a piece of art' (198). Not entirely unfairly (though he does not pay attention to big business), he points to those that see 'values become facts, which are then taught and propagated' across educational establishments and 'hoisted on to the

profession' (2). I have a certain admiration for Bennett's presumptuousness 'to dare criticise the monolithic edifice of social science, and educational science in particular' (Bennett 2013, 1), but I think his view (shared by policymakers) is one of both overestimation and underestimation. He overestimates the predictive power of RCTs and underestimates other rich forms of social science and its potential contribution to education and policy debates.

Bent Flyvbjerg also argues that social scientists should be much clearer in noting what they are trying to do with their social science and to be aware of the 'distinct categories' of the intellectual virtues of *episteme*, *techne* and *phronesis* (2001, 58). However, Bennett himself produces an ossified view of social science and its aims. He shares with those policymakers enamoured by the seductive form of "value-neutral" social science that the quantitative data may speak for itself, and what was referred to in the last section as "useful knowledge" (Moss 2016). It is a problematic form of social science that relies upon or assumes the 'existence of certain social structures or rules, as well as the assumptions of the dominant theories of such reality, and then operates in them' (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 167).

Throughout my three fieldwork chapters, I have been mindful of the fact that the messy dynamics of policy enactment are not easy to summarise, nor is it necessarily desirable to do so. For instance, there are contradictions in enactment practices and '*rich ambiguity*' which are typical of the 'complexities and contradictions of real life' (Flyvbjerg 2001, 84). But advancing this 'thick narrative' arguably adds further rhetorical and methodological appeal to the utility that enactment as a concept can bring forward better understanding about how policy occurs. It rallies against the limitations of thinking in terms of implementation, usually understood as consisting of neat borders and a linear trajectory. It has been possible, however, to draw attention to how different practices and self-interpretations are rationalised within

'the total system of relations' (135). Part of the challenge of developing a study about how we might (re)imagine English teaching or the English teacher in light of the 2013 reforms, has been the necessity to identify where micro-practices converge with or diverge from, the broader discourses of schooling.

Over thirty years ago Ivor Goodson (2006) noted that so-called "trendy theorists" (yet another stigmatising trope from an earlier era) had accurately predicted that the 1987 National Curriculum exercise would lead to diminishing teaching morale and suck agency from teachers when it was trying to provide more (16). The exercise initiated under Kenneth Baker cost the taxpayer £750 million. I am not underestimating the fact that good policymaking is hard. Daniel Willingham, in a blog piece on Gove, reflected: 'hard as it is, good science is easier than good policy' (2012). However, whilst we are working in a context where education secretaries fail to pay attention to detail, blind themselves with ossified policy analysis, run expensive experiments such as the free schools programme, or like Hinds simply shrug in exasperation their shoulders at the deeper contradictory logics of our time, critical researchers should feel emboldened to continue making their point.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. List of Speeches and Documents Analysed in this Thesis

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Gibb, Nick. 2015e. "The Purpose of Education." Speech, Education Reform Summit, July 9.

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Gibb, Nick. 2016e. "Schools as the Engines of Social Mobility." Speech, March 9.

Gibb, Nick. 2016f. "The Importance of the Curriculum." Speech, ASCL Curriculum Summit, April 27.

Gibb, Nick. 2016g. "Nick Gibb: The Importance of Education Research." Speech, ResearchED National Conference, September 10.

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Gove, Michael. 2013g. "Michael Gove: The Civil Rights Struggle of Our Time." Speech, Brighton College, November 22.

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University of East Anglia

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT – staff opt-in

(1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in a research study about the way teachers and pupils experience English teaching in the classroom, particularly in relation to the most recent changes to GCSE English. This will be a short pilot study, over the course of two weeks, to determine the suitability of the school as a research environment. If successful, there may be a more substantial study starting in September 2016.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are currently teaching English GCSE, or have involvement with its teaching at some level, and as a result are a target group for the study. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you would like them to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving your consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:
✓ Understand what you have read.
✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

(2) Who is running the study?

James Craske is conducting this study as the basis for the degree of Ph.D at The University of East Anglia. This will take place under the supervision of Dr John Gordon.

This study is being funded by the Social Science Faculty at the University of East Anglia.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

Lesson Observation: The study will require observations within your English class over the course of approximately two weeks. Nothing will change within your lesson other than having a researcher present in the classroom. This study **will not**

involve any audio or video recording. No photos will be involved. All observation notes will be hand written. The lesson I observe will help me to work out my research design for any larger-scale study later in the year. In particular, I am interested in the kinds of interactions LSA's and teachers have within the English classroom.

Semi-Structured Interviews: You may decide to accept to participate in a short interview with me around the topic of English teaching. With your permission, I may decide to audio record (with your permission). This will allow me to produce transcripts and refer back to the data when I am designing a larger-scale study and to use the data in my upgrade panel documents.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

This pilot study will take place over the course of roughly two weeks. If selected, this should only involve some of your classes. For those of you who are interviewed, interviews will last around 20-30 minutes.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia. If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by emailing the researcher at j.craske@uea.ac.uk.

(6) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

(7) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

The study will be a good opportunity to work out the challenges faced by teachers trying to teach GCSE English to vocational groups, on a day-to-day basis. In particular, the interviews will give teaching staff an opportunity to discuss their relationship to the most recent policy changes to English.

If the school is deemed a suitable for further research then this may provide a fuller picture about how English is taught in schools, and its link to recent policy changes. There may be opportnity to share some of the latest literature around English teaching with the English deapartment. I hope to engage a number of other parties involved with the policy-making process, using what I have learnt from teaching staff at the school. This might include policy thank tanks, policy-makers and other educators working within the field. The school may also see my engagement with pupil's experience of English as part of the larger call for 'pupil voice', as something that they can utilise.

(8) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

Lesson Observations: The information collected will be in the form of handwritten notes. As mentioned previously no audio or video will be collected. The results will remain entirely with me, other than where I discuss the findings with my supervisory team. No other third parties will have access to your information. Any information that I do collect will be kept confidential and will be fully anonymised. The hardcopies of my observation sheers will be kept at a secure location at my home. Observation sheets may be held for the remainder of my research project which is due to finish in October 2018.

Semi-Structured Interviews: With your permission, I may audio record interviews so I can refer back to these. During this pilot study, these may be used to justify my research design for a full-scale study later in the year, Electronic copies will be stored on an electronic device such as a digital voice recorder. This will then be transcribed into a Word document. No cloud storage will be used. The data from the pilot study may be kept until I finish the project (approx. Oct 2018). All transcripts will be sent over for you to look at and decide whether you would like to withdraw any comments. The transcript will only be shared with you.

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 1998 Data Protection Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2013).

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be individually identifiable in these publications. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed.

(9) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, James Craske will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Dr John Gordon at john.gordon@uea.ac.uk (01603 593921) or Professor Victoria Carrington at v.carrington@uea.ac.uk (01603 597236)

(10)   Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form. This feedback will be in the form of a one-page summary of the key findings. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished.

(11)   What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

Research involving humans in UK is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved under the regulations of the University of East Anglia's School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Committee.

If there is a problem please let me know. You can contact me via the University at the following address:
James Craske
School of Education and Lifelong Learning
University of East Anglia
NORWICH NR4 7TJ
j.craske@uea.ac.uk
If you would like to speak to someone else you can contact my supervisor:
Dr John Gordon   j.gordon@uea.ac.uk

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact please contact the Head of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Dr Nalini Boodhoo, at n.boodhoo@uea.ac.uk.

(12)   OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and hand it to James Craske.

Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2nd copy of the consent form for your information.

This information sheet is for you to keep

University of East Anglia

James Craske

Ph.D Candidate
29th February 2016

Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Education and
Lifelong Learning

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

(13)   What will the study involve for me?

The study will require observations within your English class over the course of approximately two weeks. Nothing will change within your lesson other than having a researcher present in the classroom. This study **will not** involve any audio or video recording. No photos will be involved. All observation notes will be hand written. No personal information will be requested beyond that of your future timetable for the following year.

(14)   How much of my time will the study take?

This pilot study will take place over the course of two weeks of your English lessons. You will not miss any lesson time as a result of this study.

(15)   Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia. If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by emailing the researcher at j.craske@uea.ac.uk.

If you decide you do not want to be in the study, I will ensure that no data is collected on you. I will be able to identify who is and is not part of the study by using a sheet that has the class's seating plan on it. I will be working with your class teacher, or the learning support assistant, to ensure this is done effectively.

(16)   Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study. Your lessons will not be significantly affected, other than having a researcher at the back of the room.

(17) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

The study will be a good opportunity to see how your class engages with GCSE English and the sorts of teaching experiences that you have.

If the school is deemed a suitable for further research then this may provide a fuller picture about how English is taught in schools, and its link to recent policy changes.

(18) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

The information collected will be in the form of handwritten notes. As mentioned previously, no audio or video will be collected. The results will remain entirely with me, other than where I discuss the findings with my supervisory team. No other third parties will have access to your information. Any information that I do collect will be kept confidential and will be fully anonymised. The hardcopies of my observation sheets will be kept at a secure location at my home. Observation sheets may be held for the remainder of my research project which is due to finish in October 2018.

The data from this short pilot study may help me to plan a fuller research project later in the year.

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the 1998 Data Protection Act and the University of East Anglia Research Data Management Policy (2013).

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be individually identifiable in these publications. In this instance, data will be stored for a period of 10 years and then destroyed.

(19) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, James Craske will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Dr John Gordon at john.gordon@uea.ac.uk (01603 593921) or Professor Victoria Carrington at v.carrington@uea.ac.uk (01603 597236)

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If you would like to speak to someone else you can contact my supervisor:
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(22)   OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?

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Please keep the letter, information sheet and the 2ⁿᵈ copy of the consent form for your information.