

Educational Research Governance Politics: A critical discourse analysis of policy

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Abstract

Sociologists recognise research or other constructions of society are not neutral. Ideologically generated ‘fact’, or ‘findings’, can reproduce elite vested interest. There is a lacuna in our knowledge about educational research policy, including inherent ideological leanings, giving cause for concern about ‘findings’ that are congruent with research policy favoured methodological paradigms. It is argued in the article that the Scottish Government’s educational research policy in Scotland, called “A Research Strategy for Scottish Education” (2017), denies recognition of critical research and theoretical critique; instead, it offers communities precarious knowledge. This research policy bias will discourage political critique of the system, including different notions of research and education values. In tandem with this research conservatism the Scottish Government regularly outsources research projects to companies through competitive tendering. Through the application of a critical discourse methodology the article uncovers the assumptions present in the 2017 strategy. That analysis is triangulated against the alliances the Scottish Government has sought in pursuit of an education system that is evidence based and informed through ‘grey literature’.

Keywords: *education, capitalism, governance, grey literature, Scotland.*

Introduction

A political science perspective on policy analysis asks how do policies, once enacted, influence political attitudes and actions? (Sykes *et al.*, 2009). The conceptual framework in the policy examined includes favoured research methods which are indicative of the wider ideological meaning of the framework, including the interplay among institutions, interests, values and ideas. I argue that the Scottish Government's 2017 educational research policy, which still informs current practice, reflects the control and directive dimensions associated with neo-liberalism, addressed by Ball (2009) in a largely English education policy landscape. This article's project is contextualised in academic literature prior to the discourse analysis of the 2017 policy document. I support the article's argument through attention to players used in network governance that Government has invited into its "competition state" networks. The article is a qualitative case study with implications for schools and higher education. It examines a privatising ideology inherent in the 2017 education research policy and its political hinterland as intimated in Ball's (2009) contribution to neo-liberal education policy analysis.

Following Locke (2015), I regard the 2017 research policy as geared to bolster 'performance' capitalism, where education is coerced to conform to a logic of performativity aimed at ensuring the efficient operation of the state in world markets. Ozga (2020 p. 19) presents this business culture as delivering technical-managerial accountability. Data governance is not, however, politically neutral (Zapp, 2017). In the case explored it may impoverish and alienate educators as a dynamic of proletarianization takes grip on the learning milieu. Education reforms in Canada have resulted in teachers becoming semi-credentialist workers with limited ideological control (Filson, 1988). Professors in higher education have also experienced this debasement of educators as

corporate values compel them to relate to students as consumers, thereby neglecting their liberal education (Barnes, 1993; Wisman & Duroy, 2020).

In recent times, Governments have insisted research knowledge must conform to a type of ‘product’, one suited to the delivery and quality control of policy interventions. The SNP’s market research company alliances - described later - illustrate definitions of appropriate and appropriated research knowledge; government policies for universities over recent decades are similarly compelling them to produce research knowledge in this way, signalled in aggressive motifs of relevance and impact (Cowen, 1996). The 2017 research policy favours quantitative methods, expertise readily available in market-research companies. This measurement-legitimated neoliberal order coerces the teaching profession and academic researchers pursuing grants into conservative measurement-led research policy governance that neglects the tangled roots of social problems (Wallace, 2019; Torrance & Forde, 2017).

The Scottish National Party (SNP) is the party in power in Scotland.

Fotheringham *et al.* (2021) argue the SNP seeks independence from the British state whilst defending the interests of Scottish capitalism and its neo-liberal place in the globalisation. Mitchell, Bennie & Johns (2011) suggest the SNP is a left-of-centre party guided by the pragmatism of its leadership cadre. The notion of neo-liberalism with a heart is another narrative - the SNP’s economic strategy lies at the centre of the other priorities, where the role of the state is to preserve an institutional framework that permits entrepreneurial freedom, free markets, free trade and strong private property rights within a country that sees globalisation as an opportunity (Cuthbert & Cuthbert, 2009).

Leading figures within the SNP rejected left-wing visions of society, other supported a centre-left development (Stewart, 2019). These depictions of political values are found to be consistent with the discoveries identified in the paper about the nature of the SNP’s vision for education and social research.¹

The political history of modern Scotland and the SNP government that came to power in 2007 involved finding new ways to manage public service delivery, state schooling being an example. In tandem with the times, the SNP developed frameworks that adopted outcome-based performance management, coupled with hierarchies of governance (Ball & Junemann, 2012; Wallace, 2019).

Players and knowledge-makers

The 'turn' to neoliberal positivistic research, awarding contracts to social research companies in the marketplace, stamps neoliberal values onto education. Positivism is rooted on the ontological doctrine that truth and reality are objective and independent of the researcher, in contrast to the interpretivist enquirer accepting multiple world views (Aliyu, 2014; Blaikie & Priest, 2017). The shift to a precariat in public universities modelled on the operational needs of capitalist business aligns with capitalist landscapes. We might conclude that a Trojan Horse has achieved entry into public sector educational worlds and is circulating through education systems in the guise of neutral scientifically produced evidence. Management of Scottish education is associated with the incorporation of the work of international organisations. Scientific management through research in Scotland is associated with international capitalist alliances which include the OECD in combination with PISA which conducts international student assessment and school rankings (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014; Kim, 2018; Lundbye, 2018; Webb, Gulson & Pitton, 2014).²

Worryingly, the 2017 education research policy operates in the landscape of publishing outside of the traditions of peer review utilised by academic journals. Rather, its policy legitimations manifest as research outputs that belong with 'grey literature' which evades the critical scrutiny of the double-blind scientific peer review process (British Academy, 2007). The concept of 'grey literature' denotes literature that has not been formally published (Hopewell, MacDonald, Clarke & Edgar, 2007). 'Grey literature' includes working-papers, preprints and

material on institutional websites (Mili, 2000). It also includes documents that are not controlled by commercial publishing organisations. They are notoriously resistant to quality assessment. It is also difficult to search for and retrieve this literature (Adams *et al.*, 2016). The proliferation of ‘grey literature’ in modern society has left readers ignorant of its quality compared with ‘white literature’ which bears the quality hallmark of peer reviewing in academic journals (Farace & Schopel, 2010 p. 30). The channel of GL diffusion is often through sites on the internet (Luzi, 2000).

Research has gradually been co-opted into this paradigm shift over several decades, so consequently research companies tendering for contracts are likely to comply with this zeitgeist: winning research contracts and being a ‘safe pair of hands’ is essential for research companies’ revenue stream. In his book *Pipers and Tunes: A Decade of Education Research in Scotland* Nisbet (1995) describes educational research funding trends in the period 1983-1994 that illustrated the education policy preferences on research funding and research funding dependencies with Government (Humes, 2013, Shore, 2016). Monetary payments have been made by research companies to Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) disclosed by MSPs, as required by the Parliament’s Code of Conduct on the Parliament’s public website *Register of Interests*.³ Gifts to MSPs for completing a modest research task may illustrate attempts to influence policy towards the private sector and be treated favourably. Ball (2007) identified the significant extent of private sector involvement in the public sector. Several private social research companies are within walking distance from Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, including ScotChem Social Research, Jump Research and Ipsos. Market research companies in the knowledge-exchange market illustrate the commercialisation of research knowledge production, suiting what Ozga (2020) termed technical managerial accountability objectives. Baele, Balzacq & Bourbeau (2018) argue these

metrical outcomes focussed data processes sustain a model of governance based upon logics of quantifying educational realities (Barjak & Heimsch, 2021).

Outsourcing research projects to commercial markets in the private sector introduces ‘destatalisation’, a process where the public-private boundary is re-drawn in favour of the private sector (Ball, 2007 p. 9). Governance mechanisms in public policy implementation now coalesce under doctrines of new public management based on behavioural-administrative science (Gruening, 2001). Ball (2016) argues the trends described as neoliberal reforms or re-modelling de-professionalise educationists. The latter’s expertise is replaced by ‘technologies’ of market, management and performance, doctrines that impair the subjective experience of being an educator. A datafication trend in trajectories of evidence-based policy making has become normative (Freidberg, 2020). In the US, metrics accompany neoliberal narratives about the commodification of nature through ecosystem services that do not have a clear ecological meaning, but through the state’s own logic they will ‘see’ only nature as enabled through its preferred unit of governance (Robertson, 2006).

Robertson (2006 p. 370) argues “Realms of knowledge interact through the contingent work of translation in places or institutions that Luhmann calls *forums of articulation*.” Studies commissioned under the 2017 policy are actors performing such articulation. Excessive government control of schooling is the new normal in England where the turn to measurement techniques has de-professionalised teaching (Povey & Whiting, 2022). Reay (2022) notes a shift to authoritarianism evident in English schooling, a trend she argues coalesces with autocratic values in UK political and economic life. In earlier times these ‘innovations’ would be judged as inimical to intellectual traditions and educational projects pivoting around local control of education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). This measured outcomes movement re-directs teacher agency towards outcome monitoring (Bohn & Sleeter, 2000; Futrell & Brown, 2000).

Domination by figures

Research metrics construct identities and measure worth through emphasising measurable outcomes (Blaikie and Priest, 2017; Weber, 1987). Hacking (1982) coins the phrase “avalanche of numbers” to describe the nineteenth century’s fetishism for statistical categorisations of society’s life events. For Hacking (1982 p. 280) the way we describe people is a by-product of the “needs of enumeration” as opposed to more inclusive and diverse classifications. Ben-Porath & Shahar (2017 p. 244) argue educational reforms informed by large data analysis will “flatten some of the features of the natural world and may give new meaning to the captured information.” Hammersley (2013) refers to research-based policy as mythmaking: it reifies a selective vision as hegemonic (Hammersley, 2005).

Biesta (2015) argues that a culture of measurement erodes the democratic dimension of the teaching profession, a pessimistic view paralleling concerns about loss of teacher agency through audit and performativity (Biesta, 2010; Humes, 2021). In the Scottish context Humes (2020) describes the management of school education as bureaucratic and lacking accountability. Others signal disassociation from real world problems in this treatment of education: the Scottish Government’s focus on quantitative measures of school attainment ironically obliterates recognition of deeply rooted sources of inequity (Torrance & Forde, 2017). Research company players in the education research grant marketplace deliver outcome-based knowledge, not critical research, for government.

The Scottish Government’s research contracting during 2018 included £50,000 won by *Craigforth* located at Castle Business Park, Stirling. This company, which appears typical of many in the sector, describes itself as a “leading social research and support company” and projects the brand virtues of “Quality Research, Genuine Insight”.⁴ Craigforth’s research team are described as

“consultants” who are “able to approach a subject from many different angles.” Absent from the self-presentations of these players are indicators of expertise with sociological concepts and associations with intellectual traditions of enquiry. That Craigforth research contract was designed to “support the implementation of the Scottish government’s commitment to provide 1140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) by 2020, and to evaluate the expansion of funded Early Learning Centres (ELCs)”.⁵ Besides Craigforth, market research companies awarded Scottish Government funding include: IPSOS Mori, SYSTRA, ScotCen Social Research, EKOS Limited, Progressive, ICF Consulting Services Limited, Why Research, and NFER (Holligan, 2013). Rhetoric of technical managerial accountability and evaluative energies leads us to expect this neoliberal zeitgeist panning out in the articulation of the Scottish Government’s research policy, so we turn to this matter in the next section of the article.

Methodology

Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a methodology conceptually congruent with qualitative research paradigms and strategies. Used across the social sciences and the humanities, it is designed to unearth ideological commitments. The Taylor and Francis journal *Critical Discourse Studies* and the Sage journal *Discourse Studies* illustrate a vibrant CDA scholarship, as does educational policy analysis (Rogers, Schaenen, Schott & O’Brien, 2016). CDA deconstructs texts to demonstrate enunciations of oppression through favoured discourses. CDA frames policy and policymaking as a discursive or semiotic process aligned with the interpretivist tradition. CDA foregrounds meaning over measurement (Fairclough, 2013). Social reality is constructed by representations inscribed in discourse (but existing beyond it) which shape perceptions of social reality.

For Fairclough (2013) discourse is a semiotic construction of reality which includes social and political values (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). CDA enables identification of neo-liberal trends and exploitation (Ball, 2007; Fairclough, 1993; Apple, 2013). Discourses are “institutionally consolidated practices of articulation” that determine individual and collective action (Reisigl, 2013 p. 11). A discourse’s bias presents as natural the favoured perspective, (Leeuwen, 2008; Ball, 2007 p. 1). In keeping with qualitative approaches, the 2017 research policy was read several times to locate thematically dominant dimensions. The rubric chosen to organise the next section elucidates those themes which are interpreted in the context of relevant studies and supporting sources.

The 2017 policy document reiterates motifs of “standards” and “quality indicators”, technicist notions consistent with Ozga’s (2020) analysis of technocratic political trends (Ben-Porath & Shahar, 2017). The National Challenge the Government sets out characterises “Key Actions” that it expects research projects to deliver. The “Key Actions” entail using “existing datasets” and developing “improved data” to “translate international lessons”, “develop new Scottish evidence” and “implement the lessons of research” for “empowering practitioners to produce and use evidence and data” and produce “secondary indicators” of school student attainment levels. The 2017 document is demonstrably managerial. Its tone and language choice eschews affiliation with academic sources or debates and methodological research issues. Extracts from this policy are exploited to support the article’s line of argument from technocratic governance.

Discourse 1: Evidential worship

A discursive strand of the 2017 Policy document presents the concept of research as “sourcing” data nationally and internationally. That model of secondary research continues with a partnership with the Education Endowment

Foundation (EEF) that harnesses data sets for use by teachers. Using the Freedom of Information Act (Scotland) 2002 (FOI) I requested from the Scottish Government on 28 February 2020 information regarding support for EEF; their response, on 25 March 2020, is congruent with this paper's re-purposing of research argument. The EEF enabled the import of the EEF's *Learning and Teaching Toolkit* into the Scottish system. EEF described this resource as comprising "accessible summaries of global research on thirty-⁶ five different educational approaches."⁷ The FOI data disclosed that the EEF received £68,000 of funding between 2017/18 and 2019/20 for its work to support the Scottish Government's policy entitled *Annual Attainment Scotland*. Appreciation of the EEF's capacity to contribute quantitative evidence for the *Toolkit* was foreshadowed in the 2017 Policy:

We believe that each level of the education system in Scotland has a vital role in harnessing the power of evidence and data in order to deliver continuous improvement in the education system. (Scottish Government 2017 p. 2)

A funding stream for EEF is called "Impetus - The Private Equity Foundation".⁸ *Impetus - The Private Equity Foundation* is registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales (Number 1152262) amongst whose trustees is Joseph Charles Scull whose occupation is listed as "investor" and "business investor" on several of the thirteen businesses with which Companies House records him as associated⁹. He is not exceptional in this nexus, testifying to the quasi-privatisation of state education, as noted in contributions on this theme by Ball (Ball, 2016). EEF provides: "Summaries of education evidence, offering teachers 'best bets' of what has worked most effectively to boost the attainment of disadvantaged pupils."

EEF was founded in 2011 receiving a £125 grant from the British conservative party. The then Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove presented EEF as an organisation designed to raise standards in challenging schools. The EEF's

founder Sir Peter Lampl had pursued a lucrative career in management consultancy and finance. A strand of EEF's educational support is conjured in terms of "Toolkits" designed to fix teaching and learning classrooms.

According to the EEF:

The Education Endowment Foundation was established in 2011 by The Sutton Trust, as a lead charity in partnership with Impetus Trust (now part of Impetus - The Private Equity Foundation) with a £125m founding grant from the Department for Education. The EEF and Sutton Trust are, together, the government-designated What Works Centre for Education"

The EEF aims to build "a global evidence ecosystem for teaching." The Scottish Government argues EEF will "help develop the Scottish research infrastructure and resource" (Scottish Government 2017 p.8). Evaluation research is the specialist area of EEF work where it encourages the strengthening of the use of evidence internationally and in Scotland's education attainment gap. The EEF contributed to the evidence base in Scottish education by funding over one hundred randomised control trials (RCTs) in education (Dawson, Yeomans & Brown, 2018 p. 292). Experimental design triumphalism may result in the teaching profession finding itself under the auspices of what Rose (1999 p. 52) calls "technologies of government". Rose proposes the latter are "imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects..." F. W. Taylor's (1856-1915) industrial production-line 'scientific management' culture, Rose (1999) argued is designed to enforce labour efficiency through conduct control that leads to selfhood-appropriation. Taylor's industrialising vision was credited with destroying the soul of work as well as dehumanizing conditions (Crowley, Tope, Chamberlain &, 2010). Educational values and purposes are overlooked by performativity science. Teachers are to fall within the auspices of a managerial superstructure of "continuous improvement", while data framing of professionalism is

accompanied by their intense monitoring (Ozga, 2009). Collegiality is reduced to designated complex teamwork that will “deploy” and “design” and facilitate “interventions” whose impact is “monitored”:

Teachers must collaborate with their Support staff, parents, children, and young people to identify patterns and outcomes for individuals. In addition, they are expected to design and deploy appropriate interventions, and monitor impact to learn lessons for improvement. (Scottish Government, 2017 p. 3)

This extract represents a prescribed model of policy development premised upon the engineering of outcomes through a partnership model based upon a formulaic notion of science. Scientific proceduralism is congruent with Ball’s (2016) recognition of a neoliberal take-over of education through data. The next extract illustrates this process within the 2017 policy:

Combining this coherent approach to data with research to effectively share the lessons of international evidence, to identify effective interventions, establish ‘what works’ in the Scottish context and continuously learn from the data that is gathered ... This data driven approach will be combined with a focus upon increasing the levels of collaboration and communication... (Scottish Government, 2017 p. 3)

Overlooked in the policy document are questions about the implications of this re-model for professionalism and local cultures of schooling. Data from overseas is harnessed from contexts friendly to the neo-liberal zeitgeist. Data interpretative issues are also neglected in favour of an ambience of confident can-do (Gaul *et al.*, 2000; Govaert, 2009).

The didactic tone and generalising sweep of these philosophically naïve extracts suggests their author/s may have had little professional experience or understanding of school life whose pleasures this policy may destroy. Emerging from the ruins of schooling will be educator proletarianization where teachers as hired labour as subordinated to the owners of capital. Proletarianization of professional employees is associated with downward mobility into a different

class; coupled with the under-deployment of the intellect. This international phenomenon is reflected in declining job autonomy and reduced participation in organisational decision-making indicative of imposed de-skilling as a trajectory within capitalism (Huber, 2019; Livingstone, 2019; Scott, 2014).

Discourse 2: Subjugating enquiry

By subjugating enquiry this choice of discourse signals the prioritization of control over research and research communities as opposed to making available opportunity to exercise voice and agency or otherwise to question and formulate projects without the burden of bureaucratic gatekeeping. That research model affords access by the private sector and third sector players to integrate its systems with government and the public sector. The 2017 strategy is then not a narrative of enlightenment, instead it situates research as a tool to service policy needs and their public legitimation. Research in this official world does not associate with disciplinary traditions and intellectual contestations, but is co-opted as a managerial ideal practice that confers a subterfuge of objectivity on policy decision-making and its delivery. It is arguably moulded as a mechanistic tool for engineering the delivery of priorities through a prescribed partnership system with local education authorities and other bodies managing the state education system. This paradigm has international resonance: Woelert *et al.* (2013) characterise research governance in Australia's higher education system where a politically charged rhetoric of innovation sits in conflict with the actual trend towards diminishing scope for autonomy in knowledge production.

The conduct of educational research is not channelled through the self-organisational forms associated with the inequalities-led critiques of teacher-researcher and academic grass-roots movements. Those constituencies routinely probe concepts of the education effectiveness movement (Slee, Weiner & Tomlinson, 1998). Facing us, instead, are position statements such as:

We will incorporate the governance of this programme within the wider governance arrangements in place for education in Scotland, and in particular will ensure reporting lines to the National Improvement Framework Programme Board. (Scottish Government, 2017 p. 14)

Choice of the terms “incorporate”, “governance arrangements” and “reporting lines” are politically congruent with Ozga’s (2020) argument about technical managerialism. A “Board” has oversight of researchers, academic or contracted, whose status is proletarianized. Williamson (2015, 2016) describes “reporting lines” and accountability hierarchies as policy instruments, neglecting how they become weaponised to ‘manage’ alternative ideas and policy. Governance is extended to vaguely identified “stakeholders” while the expertise and values of “a wider group of researchers” are not transparent:

An **Academic Reference Group**¹⁰, containing a wider group of researchers and stakeholders, will be convened to offer advice and guidance on the future direction of the strategy. (Scottish Government, 2017 p. 14)

The marginality of academia noted during the literature review is foregrounded by their status as a “Reference Group”. This type of benchmarking suggests they play a diminished role in educational research for government. As members of this group remain unidentified, mystery remains about what expertise they will provide. The marginal status of academics has historical continuity: Halsey (1995) identified decades earlier what he grandly called a decline of “donnish tradition” (Barnes, 1993, Roberts, 1993). Maintaining this discourse of subjugating enquiry, the 2017 policy foregrounds “a need to maintain accessible up-to-date summaries of the state of existing evidence on interventions” (Scottish Government, 2017: 14). Governance is framed through idioms of “delivering”, “secretariat”, “evolution”, “cost” and “investments”. Accordingly, the National Advisory Group that evaluates performance and delivery needs:

...will be made up of organisations who have a direct role in evaluation and research. They will feed into the development and evolution of the strategy, but have a more direct role in delivering aspects and will be well informed about existing networks and investments in education research. (Scottish Government, 2017 p. 14)

Organisations with the allocated “direct role” will inevitably be private sector companies that are already affiliated. Governance terminology eschews intellectual transparency. Williamson’s (2015, 2016) argument that governing practices have turned to digital data-base technologies as policy instruments is likely to intensify as research that produces metrics can be readily incorporated into digital systems. Edu-capitalism relies upon technocratic governance to deliver the state’s ambition to foster curricula that embrace a globalising knowledge economy through innovation and economic activity (Lauder, 2012; Dimmock & Goh, 2011). Through impeding forms of enquiry, a subtle authoritarianism is arguably allowed to flourish, where debate and contestation may be constructed as self-indulgence and annoyingly leftfield. The 2017 document crafts a vision for knowledge creation and management which bears some comparison with what George Orwell, in his dystopian science fiction novel “Nineteen Eighty-Four”, published in 1949, imagined as a normalisation of hierarchic control by a Ministry of Truth.

Discourse 3: Debate containment

Writing about processes of mental health care administration in Australia with reference to Orwell’s dystopian novel, academic psychiatrists, describing his novel as prescient, concluded medical healthcare was distorted by politization, spin and a refusal to acknowledge realities (Looi, Allison, Kisley & Maguire 2020 p.115). Divergence from mainstream administrative norms is effectively prohibited and reality distorted through the containment of debate by means of bullet-point discourse. The fifteen pages that comprise the 2017 research policy document are peppered by a disproportionately huge array of ninety-five bullet

points (Scottish Government, 2017). Exemplars of the ‘can do’ corporate action posture fall within the sections entitled “The research challenge” and “System characteristics and performance: what works and what has worked?”.

Illustrations of this positioning ideology are:

- “Deploying the best available international evidence through partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).
- Translating international lessons into the Scottish context and developing new Scottish research evidence.
- Examining the capacity and structure of education professionals to receive and implement the lessons of research and recommend necessary changes”. (Scottish Government, 2017: p. 4)

Wolf’s (2018) reminds us that public relations bullet point discourse allows corporate goals to avoid challenge. A bullet point narrative form neglects contested problems and policy ambiguity. Instead, it foregrounds scientific benchmarks that at first glance lie beyond politics, including the notion of “best available international evidence” and “translating international lessons”.

Instead, we are expected to “to receive” and “implement” lessons of research, possibly drawn from grey literature without blind peer review evaluation.

Discourse is a site of agency and power (AlHaidari, 2017).

Workplace meetings display hierarchy and technical procedural steps that are mandated by policies (AlHaidari, 2017). Business communication advocates recommend visual toolkits to make messages stick (Shaw, 2015). Bullet point communication in this context is a process of propagandistic rationalisation, where threat from alternative visions is sealed off. The material form of the policy on paper controls audience uptake like an administrative “invisible hand” (Gerth & Mills, 2009). Taylor Webb (2011 p. 735) argues neo-liberalism within an administrative demeanour is still a political-economic theory that emphasises

the efficiency of market economics to develop and legitimate government priorities. Elias's (2019) theorising of strategic behaviour connects the SNP's privileging of economy with the econometric business-like, unacademic ambience of the 2017 educational research policy enunciation.

Discussion

Fordham (2015) reminds us that Stenhouse's original vision of teacher research on curriculum construction and interpretation has disappeared from British education policy. In its place is a 'what works' pragmatism, legitimated using quantitative research methodologies. That discovery about a lost culture of teacher research appears, in the light of the current article, to be a policy trend. The 2017 research policy, besides translating the value-laden concept of education into a business accountancy entity, begs the question about the concept of education. It positions it in organisational audit familiar to business appraisal audit protocols (Barth, Landsman & Lang, 2008; Baudot, Demek & Huang, 2018). The contemporary neo-liberal perspective, ensconced within quantitative methods, contrasts with a political left-leaning quantitative social research tradition associated with Oxford University, led by the renowned sociologist A.H. Halsey, education advisor to the government on inequality, Christian socialist and scholar-intellectual (Halsey, 1996). The narrow political framing of quantitative methods is what distinguishes the 2017 research policy zeitgeist from the academic-intellectual research orientation associated with Halsey and his colleagues.

A radical heritage informed the early empirical sociology of education apparent in the work of Halsey and colleagues; their political arithmetic intellectual tradition within academia echoes Fabianism and is ideologically very distant from the politics of neo-liberal administrative research critiqued in this article.. The review of literature in this article demonstrates that academia, through externally imposed research impact and relevance agendas, is also likely to be a

casualty of neo-liberal power. London Fabians sought progressive taxation, redistributive public expenditure and nationalisation of key industries as the best strategy to eliminate poverty and achieve social reforms in Britain (Hill, 2013). Halsey and colleagues sought to engage state policymakers through survey data that uncovered inequalities of class (Heath, 2000; Medema, 2015). This political arithmetic tradition aimed to hold governments to account (Lauder *et al.* 2004). As noted, the contemporary neo-liberal government's co-option of quantitative paradigms annexes concepts of objectivity and truth as tools to strengthen the power of policy (Ball, 2007 p. 2). Hartley (2019) describes how algorithmic bureaucratic governance of education is managerial. Biesta (2009) laments that early promises of innovation in terms of the recent English government's Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) disappointingly turned to foregrounding metrical evidence and suppressing controversial educational value issues.¹¹ Biesta (2010) is not alone in his concern that what is measurable can evaporate what is educational important. Goldstein (2004) describes how US teachers policed themselves into silence as they feared professional sanctions if they critiqued the 2001 US policy '*No Child Left Behind*' aimed at eradicating the achievement gap with increased accountability for schools. That experience of policy domination and fear chimes with the incorporation of Orwellian themes in this article.

Externally produced data about educational effectiveness is a branch of the thought control anticipated over a teaching workforce. This Orwellian thrust is evident in this article's discursive journey, and it may re-model professionalism (Lingard, 2013). As noted above, the Scottish Government recognised *The Education Endowment Foundation* (EEF) as an important player in what is arguably a re-modelling agenda. Likewise in higher education we can speculate about parallels with cultures of school teaching. Academic teachers are

subjected to intense line-managed control by audited performance targets and income generation expectations (Kalfa & Taksa, 2017, Macfarlane 2022).

In summary, the education governance regime explored in this article has led to two areas of general conclusion: firstly, it has been argued that cultures of teaching will encounter the imposition of metrics of quantitative research control and attendant evaluative regimes. Secondly, the 2017 research policy is categorically different from the philosophical values adopted by Halsey and colleagues despite a degree of shared scientific practice. In fact, it is a challenge to learn what values it affiliates with outside of its mechanisms of direction and knowledge control.

The SNP framing of education research is affording alliances with the private sector favoured by the British Conservative party over the public sector. These trends suggest an enduring continuity of change, re-modelling the teaching profession into a culture of auditability. It arguably pivots academic research communities into becoming neo-liberal players instructed to be relevant in research by annual research audits in a competitive capitalist marketplace. The presence of league tables of ‘merit’ in both the school and higher education sectors in the UK suggests convergence to a unitary policy goal designed to re-orientate the energies of educators into politicized common-sense.

Endnotes

¹The SNP government’s research contract funding awards can be accessed at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-research-contracts-awarded-by-the-scottish-government/>. Downloaded: 02/01/23.

² <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/pisa2018technicalreport/> downloaded 23/1/23.

³ <https://www.parliament.scot/msps/register-of-interests>. Downloaded: 02/01/23.

⁴ <http://www.craigforth.co.uk/>.

⁵ <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Research/About/Social-Research/SR-Contracts>. Downloaded: 1/02/20.

⁶ <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/>

⁷ FOI Reference: 202000018463. The Toolkit contract ended on 31st March 2020.

⁸ <https://impetus.org.uk/our-team>

⁹ Joseph Charles SCHULL personal appointments - Find and update company information at company-information.service.gov.uk

¹⁰ Highlighting this reference group is a stylistic part of the 2017 policy document.

¹¹ TLRP *Teaching and Learning Research Programme*.

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