An investigation into teachers' professional autonomy in England: implications for policy and practice.

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Abstract

The current coalition government in England has expressed its commitment to establishing an autonomous teaching profession. This study argues that such autonomy cannot exist in a system that is ideologically driven by market forces and neo-liberal policy. The best situation that most teachers can hope to experience – barring a seismic shift in material conditions – is an earned and scrutinised autonomy, which is an oxymoronic concept. It is argued that the tight control exercised by the state over what happens in schools through its promotion of market forces, reinforces the ideological nature of schooling in England. The theoretical and ontological basis of the study resides in an orthodox Marxist perspective and analyses the way in which neo-liberalism has formed the basis for the material conditions under which teachers currently work. It develops this idea to demonstrate how this dominant ideology pervades current discourse about pedagogy and curriculum, reducing such discourse to a narrower consideration of 'standards'. It considers how this diminution of what the curriculum has become has, in its turn, had an impact on teachers' view of their professional autonomy. Data are gathered from two rounds of interviews with 22 serving teachers complemented by some written responses from them. Six others with a professional interest in education policy-making, four of whom are headteachers, are also interviewed. The conclusion is drawn that teachers' autonomy remains restricted, with any independence of action largely contingent upon the production of outcomes measured against limited, pre-determined and ideologically driven outcomes. The study identifies a disconnection between the aspirations of teachers with regard to their professional autonomy and those of some, but not all, headteachers. A further disconnection between the aspirations of teachers and the policies of central government is also identified. Significantly, teachers may enjoy more professional autonomy in those schools which currently, and possibly temporarily, enjoy market popularity. In terms of a contribution to the debate about teacher autonomy, the study demonstrates that, notwithstanding the effects of the current policy ensemble, teachers maintain a sense of what

education could offer young people that goes beyond the existing, reductive models that frame their working lives.

Chapter 1

Introduction: the teacher's soul in jeopardy.

Suddenly, while you're asleep, they'll absorb your minds
(Invasion of the Body Snatchers, 1956)

I make my way to the back of the classroom and settle down with my papers. I am to observe one of my trainees – for that is what I have learnt to call my students - who is about to demonstrate her abilities as a teacher of English with a class of Year 10 children – fourteen and fifteen year olds. This is what I now do for a living; I train new teachers. For nearly thirty years prior to this I was an English teacher myself and can still, I hope, empathise with this young woman as she nervously prepares herself for this important event of a visit from her tutor. In our conversation prior to entering the room I have done my best to make sure that she is relaxed and so ensure that she gives of her best. I have little doubt that she will acquit herself as capably as she has done throughout the training course. The afternoon is pleasantly warm, the room comfortable and the children tractable and genial. I have been told by my trainee that she is going to introduce the class to J.B.Priestley's play *An Inspector Calls*. I am looking forward to it.

It is worth taking a moment to have a word about this particular text. As a teacher it has been a perennial favourite of my own, not least because of the predictability of its impact on young people. The play ingeniously and intriguingly exposes the callous cruelty of a smug, self-satisfied and prosperous family towards a young factory worker (even as I explain this here, I am reluctant to spoil the plot for any reader who does not know the piece). It is a compelling metaphor for man's enduring selfishness and stupidity, set just before the first world war, with the head of the family declaring the impossibility of such an event, and written just after the second, with the dreadful realisation that even those early horrors had been superseded. Having taught it over the years, I began to pride myself in measuring out just how much could be covered in individual lessons in order to finish at a

suspenseful moment, leaving room for speculation about how the plot would develop. As more technology became available to me in the classroom, I was able to take advantage of a number of excellent TV and film adaptations.

The lesson begins. We are told we are studying a play. Inevitably, a murmur goes round the room expressing a desire to take a part or not – along with the inevitable enquiry as to whether we 'will be watching a video, Miss?' But wait. Before we begin the play we are...…going to look at some historical context? No. Acquire some biographical detail about Priestley, perhaps? Not this time. Point out that there is currently a new production in the West End where audiences are still riveted by this brilliantly constructed dramatic artifice – further proof positive of the durability of this fifty-year-old piece of work? Not on this occasion. What we *are* going to do is to remind ourselves of the assessment criteria for the assignment we will have to complete at the end of this series of lessons. And then we are given that assignment, which my experienced eye immediately recognises as a title that, in itself, gives away a major part of the plot. The class is then asked whether or not that title may give them some indication as to what the play may be about. I slump – although I hope not visibly. I am bound to ask myself why, after some thirty minutes of the lesson, we haven't resorted to the apparently outdated measure of reading the text or watching a film clip to find out.

The trainee performs competently. She has a pleasant but firm manner, is well prepared and her copious paperwork is in impeccable order. By way of a footnote, I am pleased to report that she is currently building a successful teaching career for herself. At the end of the lesson, when I am to feed back to her, she is accompanied by the teacher in the school assigned to be her mentor. She is a young woman not much older than herself and this assignation of relatively inexperienced staff to this position of responsibility has become very common. Although my trainee has demonstrated undoubted competence, I do wish to make the point that I feel that she has not done justice to the wonderful material with which Priestley has provided her. I clumsily attempt to make light of this by saying that in the unlikely event of her ever asking me to the theatre for the evening I would be forced to decline on

the grounds that she'd give away the ending before we go in. The two young women look bemused. When, in more serious vein I attempt to point out that she should try to capture the attention and imagination of children – most of whom will be far less amenable than this likeable group – before dampening everything by talking of assessment, her mentor visibly bridles at these remarks from what she may possibly see as a relic from some detached ivory tower. The scheme of work for this play, she tells me with some spirit, has yielded very good examination grades. I hesitate as to whether or not I should comment on such a justification, but settle for the path of least resistance and acknowledge that this is, indeed, an important consideration. I forebear to mention that my strong suspicion is that these children would get such grades anyway and could possibly have a good deal more fun on the way to doing so.

This is not an isolated episode. I could have chosen from a whole range of examples. As a tutor and an experienced teacher I had attempted to encourage innovation – even daring – in my approach to my trainees and how they developed as teachers. Many were intellectually sharp, practically all were very thoughtful, some were hugely funny and inventive and almost all brought a sense of deep-seated commitment to their work, along with a love of their subject. Gradually, however, as they spent more time in schools, they appeared to slip into a dull conformity and, above all, an acceptance of the need to comply with schemes and approaches that were deemed 'effective.'

As the end of one particular academic year approached, the routine external examination by a fellow professional from another institution was required and, as part of this, it was necessary for this examiner to observe some lessons and comment on the judgements made about them. Having identified the three trainees to be observed we find ourselves watching the one identified as 'middling' – neither a high-flyer nor remotely close to failing the course, but a solid, competent student (as I persist in thinking of these trainees). Again, we sit at the back of the room. The lesson is entitled 'writing to argue or persuade.' I wait to hear the theme; almost certainly one of the usual, sensible stand-bys such as euthanasia, smoking bans, school uniform

or fox-hunting. But no theme emerges and some fifteen minutes later we are still trudging our way through hints on sentence structure, the use of exciting vocabulary (with no pertinent examples) and the prime necessity of including as many connectives as possible. I turn to my fellow professional and express the view that I genuinely hope that he does not think that I have taught her to teach in this way. He sighs and places a consoling hand on my shoulder. 'You don't have to tell me,' he says. 'It's like the invasion of the body snatchers.'

These young women are beginning their teaching careers in circumstances entirely different from my own, which began in 1976. But lest the reader think that this is a study based on the yearning for a bygone golden age, this is not the case. Although afforded a degree of independence and autonomy that would be unthinkable in the second decade of the twenty-first century, this was also coupled with elements of lack of direction and coherence. The notion of licensed autonomy (Dale, 1989) that will inform much of the discussion in this study was not without its shortcomings. Nevertheless, as a professional I was clearly in the position of validating or challenging those values and ideas that I had brought into my chosen occupation, through having the freedom to pursue schemes and plans that seemed to me to be relevant to the needs of the young people for whom I was responsible. Although subject to the codes of conduct and expectations required of any professional (or, indeed, any worker), in terms of the exercise of autonomy, restrictions were few and regulations only loosely apparent. The incremental growth of a culture of accountability through the production of measurable outcomes, which results in driving a young teacher to consider assessment objectives before social justice, had not yet begun.

The investigation into teachers' professional autonomy that follows is, then, informed by my own experience as a teacher of English and as a teacher educator. There is another element that influences this work and that is my involvement with teacher trade unionism and associated activism: I regard these elements as being entirely bound up with each other. It is important here to include a salient example of this activism as it has resonance throughout the work that follows. In 1993 the UK government attempted to

introduce the first of the wave of national tests proposed in the 1988 Education Reform Act – about which significant discussion appears below. A vigorous joint campaign of teacher trade unions, including the threat of industrial action, ensured that such tests did not go ahead (Coles, 1994; Jones, 1994). It is worth underlining the issue here: teachers were prepared to take industrial action – the percentages voting to do so on a turnout of over 90% were overwhelming – not in order to demand improvements in pay or conditions but to defend the content of the curriculum and their professional autonomy. This testament to teachers' professional confidence is extraordinary, especially when one consider that much of the strength of the campaign stemmed from teachers' willingness to court parental support for their actions which was, indeed, forthcoming. There has been no such manifestation of professional confidence on the part of teachers in the UK since (Berry, 2009).

This essentially political dimension is inseparable from the theoretical foundation on which this work is based. As a consequence, the study places the individual teacher in a broad context that goes beyond particular schools or local and topical circumstances and in the wider sphere of the political and economic conditions that drive her daily actions. It argues that what teachers teach and how they teach it is a political issue. That this has always been the case is probably beyond dispute. Writing of the needs of 'the new civilization of the machinery age' prior to the Education Act of 1870 – often referred to as the Forster Act - G.D.H.Cole (1938) sets out the increasingly close relationship between the state and the education system:

> Industry needed operatives who were able to read its rules and regulations, and an increasing supply of skilled workers able to work to drawings and to write at any rate a simple sentence. Commerce needed a rapidly growing army of clerks, book-keepers, shop-assistants, touts and commercial travellers. The State needed more civil servants and local government employees for the developing tasks of public administration. The growing professions needed more skilled helpers. And, apart from all of this, the *paperasserie* of the new world of machine

production and parliamentary government made illiteracy more and more a nuisance which had to be put down. (Cole, 1938: 356-7)

Such observations mark the beginnings of the challenge to the 'dominance of the old humanist tradition' (Dale 1989: 128) and the gradual prevalence of a model of education as the producer of human capital. In the same way that Forster's Act stands as something of a landmark in the development of educational provision, the Butler Education Act of 1944 had a profound effect on the accessibility of formal education, albeit in a way that rationed and allocated provision in a crude and questionable manner. However, even this significant measure of state intervention did not attempt to fundamentally disturb the licensed autonomy enjoyed by teachers and schools.

On October 18th, 1976 – some six weeks after I started my own teaching career and, as such, a point in time of enormous significance for me personally and professionally – Prime Minister James Callaghan delivered a speech at Ruskin College that for many observers has marked the beginning of the modern age in terms of the relationship between the state and education. The speech is notable for a number of reasons, not least its resonance with the most (in)famous of New Labour's later neologisms:

> The Labour movement has always cherished education: free education, comprehensive education, adult education. (Callaghan, 1976)

Callaghan goes on to question the validity of informal teaching methods and to put the case that, as with the economy and all other matters of state, the education of the nation's young people is a legitimate concern for all – including politicians. In comments that paved the way for the introduction of the National Curriculum through the Education Reform Act of 1988, Callaghan talks of there being:

> no virtue in producing socially well-adjusted members of society who are unemployed because they do not have the skills. Nor at the other extreme must they be technically efficient robots. Both of the basic

purposes of education require the same essential tools. These are basic literacy, basic numeracy, the understanding of how to live and work together, respect for others, respect for the individual. This means requiring certain basic knowledge and skills and reasoning ability. (Callaghan, 1976)

Although occasionally contested in terms of its significance (Batteson, 1997) there is broad consensus that this speech marks, at the very least, a convenient starting point from which to examine the current nature of government interest – and intervention – in educational provision.

Concepts of accountability, the efficacy of certain methodologies and the notion of value for money, now so centrally installed and normalised as part of educational discourse, are articulated in Callaghan's speech in a manner that challenges Dale's concept of licensed autonomy in a way that had never previously happened. The William Tyndale affair in 1975 (Gretton and Jackson, 1976; Dale, 1989) gave apparent legitimacy to Callaghan's call for the opening up of the secret garden of what happened in schools and marked the beginning of a period of unapologetic state intervention, ultimately to become bound up with neo-liberal theories of the unchallengeable nature of the benefits of market forces. Such intervention became firmly legitimised in the 1988 Education Reform Act, representing as it did a 'restructuring of the basic power bases of the education system and a decisive break with the political priorities that informed the drafting and passing of the 1944 Education Act' (Flude and Hammer, 1993: vii).

The hegemony of market-led ideology in education appears to have become fixedly entrenched over the twenty year period during which the provisions of the Act and its wider implications have been played out. Writing about the 'soul of the teacher' that appears to have been abducted as part of this process, Ball (1999) is pessimistic:

It is difficult not to conclude that political enthusiasm for accountability and competition are threatening both to destroy the meaningfulness of

'authentic' teaching and profoundly change what it means 'to teach' and to be a teacher. The global trends of school improvement and effectiveness, performativity and management are working together to eliminate emotion and desire from teaching – rendering the teacher's soul transparent but empty. (Ball, 1999:9)

When one hears anecdotes like that which begins this chapter, such a view seems entirely valid. The teacher, it seems, has been reduced in such circumstances to a techno-rationalist craftsman who has left the inner core of her/his beliefs outside the classroom door. I would like to argue in this study that the picture is not so irredeemably gloomy, albeit that the extent to which those who drive and form policy have any concern for the teacher's soul is questionable to say the least.

This glimmer of optimism – for that is all it is – stems from interactions with various teachers (as well as from the identified respondents themselves) since I embarked on this study. On many occasions I found myself in conversation with serving teachers about having begun this doctorate, conscious of the need both to be able to explain it succinctly as well as in a way that would not prompt immediate and visible boredom on their part. I would explain that I was investigating teachers' professional autonomy and often add a further explanatory comment about exploring why teachers seemed to end up teaching in a way that ran counter to their intuition and personal values. The willingness of such teachers to respond to this with obvious understanding and, very frequently, to furnish me, unprompted, with very recent examples of how their practice had been affected in this way was remarkable. At a schools' debating event at which I was presiding as a judge, printed autobiographical details in the programme mentioned my studying for a doctorate about teacher autonomy. During the interval, two young teachers sought me out to express their interest, to offer themselves as respondents and to relate at length their frustrations at the restrictions under which they operate. A teaching acquaintance of some twenty-five years' standing, having heard about the study, both called and emailed insisting that she be interviewed as she was so interested (having completed the interviewing

process by this time her comments are not included in the report on the responses, albeit that I met her to hear her views.) Respondents themselves, some of whom I meet from time to time in the course of my professional duties, express impatience to see the outcome of the work. The soul of the teacher, it seems, survives despite the seemingly overwhelming volume of policy that it encounters.

It is worth considering the choice of this metaphor of the soul. For some commentators, Marx's concentration on the centrality of material conditions appears to preclude consideration of such ephemeral matters. I would argue, however, that such a view is an incomplete characterisation of the ideas of Marx – and Marxists - in relation to the human spirit. When talking of the spirit being 'afflicted with the curse of being burdened with matter' (Marx and Engels, 1974: 51) Marx bemoans the fact that such affliction prevents us from being 'real, active men' (47). The argument here is not that Marx's view of man is *bereft* of a spiritual outlook, but that, too often, such needs are distorted and corrupted by class society (Callinicos, 2002; Draper, 1966; Eagleton, 2012). In short, Marx is 'not the bloodlessly clinical thinker of anti-Marxist fantasy' (Eagleton, 2011:140). Fromm (1961) reminds us that it is a falsification of Marx's concepts to equate the need to fulfil material requirements with the abnegation of spiritual needs – and that human wholeness, in all of the ways in which this can be interpreted, is more likely to flourish unencumbered when freed from the constant pursuance of that which is needed to maintain physical wellbeing. That is not to argue that the notion of such spirituality per se is a central part of this thesis, but that this convenient metaphor is apposite when investigating why it may be that teachers find themselves fulfilling their professional duties in such a formulaic manner.

This study explores teachers' professional autonomy and considers the relevance of this in the context of policy and current practice. The theoretical position is a Marxist one, framing the investigation against a political and economic perspective which sees the hegemony of neo-liberalism as its most prominent feature. The locus of the study is specifically England where

successive governments since 1976 have embraced a neo-liberal, market led approach to education in a more enthusiastic way than the rest of the United Kingdom which, in some respects, clings on to some remaining communitarian principles (Chitty, 2009) and where, in Scotland, a 'different cultural positioning of education' (Arnott and Menter, 2007:254) has put something of a brake on the dominance of marketization. In England a more vigorous drive towards privatisation, managerialism and performance drove the neo-liberal agenda at greater speed than elsewhere. The provisions of the Education Act of 2002 (Legislation UK) opened up a situation where, unlike some other EU member states, regulation in respect of market access to education establishments and the potential for business takeovers could be effected with few legislative obstructions (Beckmann et al, 2009). This thesis argues that the teacher, and the practice of teachers, is positioned in relation to an array of forces that operate to affect their practice and infract their autonomy. The study also questions why this may or may not be of concern to teachers themselves or to the governments that have systematically and unrelentingly encroached upon their independence. The direction of the argument is that, after Marx, the material and economic base of society and its dominant ideology manifests itself in the priorities of an education system in a way that affects the everyday, daily action of teachers who have acceded to a degree of conformity and acquiescence - in fact if not always in spirit.

Chapter 2 establishes the Marxist basis of the study, justifying the choice of a theoretical position that, although not completely abandoned by the academy, enjoys limited credence and popularity. The argument about the validity of pursuing a grand narrative approach in an era of more modish postmodernism is initiated here and resurfaces passim throughout the study. The hegemony of neo-liberalism is placed in a historical context, with particular emphasis on its growing prevalence in UK social policy in general and education policy in particular. The dominance of the concepts of education as the producer of human capital along with schools in England becoming managed institutions is discussed and the central idea of performativity is introduced, reliant as it is upon the production of educational outcomes as recognised quality markers.

Having established this theoretical position, Chapter 3 examines the impact of these economic and political circumstances on the notion of curricula. It argues that the discourse around such curricula in England has been systematically reduced from broader concepts of emancipation and liberal humanism to a narrow and reductive discussion of standards and effectiveness. The chapter examines the requirement, in competitive market terms, to atomise and itemise learning, creating ideological priorities within curricula and then subjecting these to public scrutiny in order to fit a discourse of accountability and the effectiveness of competition.

From here, Chapter 4 places the idea of teachers' professional autonomy firmly in the context of a wider political and economic discourse, discussing contested notions of teachers' class position in relation to profit and surplus value. Looking at the work of a range of academics it traces chronologically the development of the concept of teacher autonomy in England in recent decades and identifies the broad consensus that a diminution of such autonomy is inextricably bound up with the dominance of the way in which neo-liberal policy has marketized and commodified schools and education.

Chapter 5 traces the ideological provenance of this legislation – the superstructure arising from the base discussed in the previous chapter - and posits the notion that much of this legislation stems from historical and traditional thinking about education formulated around the loosely formed New Right axis in the mid 1970s. Chapters 5 and 6 reinforce the idea that the range of forces inimical to teacher autonomy is deep-rooted, hegemonic and subject to ongoing reinforcement through continuing iterations of neo-liberal policies.

Chapter 6 examines in some detail the education legislation enacted by the coalition government in the first eighteen months of its period of office from May, 2010. The inclusion of this chapter is of great significance for two reasons. First, in terms of the impact of this legislation, particularly at a time of worldwide financial crisis, it places the findings of the data in the very social and political context that frames the theoretical drive and direction of this

study and, as such, reinforces the centrality of this intellectual position. Second, it forms the starting point of the central debate implicit within the study: despite frequent reference in such legislation to the notion of teacher autonomy, to what extent is such support for this idea credible when placed in the context of a raft of potentially stifling and inhibiting legislation?

Taken together, Chapters 2 to 6 constitute the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 7 then outlines the methodological approach adopted to gather the data from teachers that are designed to further examine this theoretical position. Placing the study firmly within an interpretivist paradigm, the concept of critical social theory is used to contextualise the data collection and the analysis of it. Fundamentally, and congruent with the Marxist notion of consciousness being formed in circumstances beyond the individual's making, it is argued that there is no clean slate onto which is inscribed the collection of data or what it reveals. The lived experience of respondents at the time of the data collection is never separated from the broader political and social sphere in which they operate. The chapter explains that the principal, but not sole, method of data collection about teachers' view of their professional autonomy is the semi-structured interview and outlines the process by which this data is analysed.

Chapter 8, 9 and 10 reveal what teachers, and some of their institutional leaders, think about their professional autonomy. A few words of explanation are required about how this part of the work is structured. The original body of respondents – 22 serving classroom teachers – was interviewed on an individual basis in the late Spring of 2010. There was always the intention that these individuals would be interviewed again some six months or so later. In May, 2010 a general election was held in the UK and a change of government resulted. The newly elected government, which eventually emerged as an uneven coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats - with the former as by far the dominant partner – made reform of schools and education one of its immediate priorities; this process is also examined in some detail in Chapter 6. As a consequence, Chapter 8 finishes with an outline of the contemporary political developments as they affected education and which, inevitably, had

their impact on the second round of interviews which took place in the autumn of 2010 and which are documented in Chapter 9. Chapter 10 puts the findings from the teacher interviews and responses to a smaller group of headteachers and individuals with an interest in policy making. This took place in Spring, 2011 and was undertaken to broaden the nature of the data collection and to create a link with the second objective of this work which is to relate the relevance – or not – of the concept of teacher autonomy to current policy and practice.

Chapter 11 considers the conclusions arising from bringing the data and its analysis together with current manifestations of policy and raises a number of emergent questions. The extent to which power is open to persuasion by interpretative research from practitioners in the field is addressed and the rather stark conclusion drawn that, notwithstanding all attempts at producing convincing and rigorous results, such research is likely to fall on the deaf ears of policy makers. Subsequent questions are then posed about the value of a research project of this sort and indications are given as to how this particular piece of work can be developed in the future. Given that the data demonstrate that the soul of the teacher has not been entirely captured – which, as the chapters that follow show, some commentators and, indeed, practitioners clearly believe it to have been – the study draws the conclusion that resistance may be unfashionable but it is not entirely unfeasible or useless: interpretation is one thing, change, as Marx would have insisted, is another. In terms of contribution to knowledge, this work can be summarised as demonstrating that despite the significant impact of political, economic and ideological influences that infringe professional autonomy, not all teachers have lost sight of a vision of education that goes beyond hegemonic and reductive models characterised by the production of measurable results.

Chapter 2

Base and superstructure: how neo-liberalism came to the classroom.

> *We are talking about investing in human capital in an age of knowledge.*
> *To compete in the global economy.* (Department for Education and
> Employment, 1997:3)

This chapter draws upon a range of literature and other sources to present the
view that, correspondent with the orthodox Marxist theory of base and
superstructure (Marx, 1859), it is economic conditions that are the driving
force behind what happens in schools. It provides historical and political
background that explains the nature and effect of the rise of neo-liberal
ideology, drawing the conclusion that a market-led view of education leads to
a reification and commodification of education within a system that demands
identifiable, hard-edged results and outcomes. From here, subsequent
chapters consider how the dominant ideology of neo-liberalism has a
pervasive and immediate impact on the construction of the curriculum and,
ultimately, teachers' individual and collective autonomy. Jones (2007: xvii)
argues that:

> The impact of globalisation on educational theory, policy and practice
> has been a primary research concern around the world since 1990,
> although the impact of globalisation on actual classroom practice has not
> been as great as we might imagine.

This study takes issue with the second part of this sentence, arguing that it is
precisely at the level of classroom organisation that neo-liberalism has had its
impact on teachers' professional autonomy.

2.1   'There is no alternative': neo-liberalism as a dominant ideology.

The oft-cited (although, strictly, apocryphal) epigram from British Prime
Minister Margaret Thatcher captures the dominance of neo-liberal thinking

that had become firmly established within a decade of Callaghan's 1976 Ruskin speech. To see education in anything other than in terms of the production of human capital was to be out of tune with mainstream political thinking. So firmly had this concept become entrenched that some seven years after Margaret Thatcher's political demise, a senior adviser to Prime Minister Tony Blair – himself enduringly associated with an election pledge dedicated to the centrality of education – readily advocated the need to recognise a market approach to address the perceived ills of public service:

> Social democrats must respond to the criticism that, lacking market discipline, state institutions become lazy and the services they deliver shoddy. (Giddens, 1998:75)

This section traces how this political position, harnessed as it was to the dominant neo-liberal economic model on a global scale, had its effects on education policy. The broader study goes on to observe how this policy in its turn affects practice at the level of schools and individual teachers.

Three questions form the framework for this explication:

1. What are the origins of neo-liberal economic theory?
2. What have been the prevailing material, political and socio-economic conditions that account for its emergence as the dominant economic ideology?
3. In what ways is this relevant to a study of education policy in general and teachers' autonomy in particular?

2.2 Marxism: out of date and out of tune?

The theory of base and superstructure is captured in Marx's preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* in which he proposes that:

> The totality of (the) relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and

political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. (Marx, 1859)

Although the proposition that economic forces drive societal developments is widely accepted, with even US presidential campaign teams exhorted to remember on a daily basis that 'it's the economy, stupid', the connection of this to any relational superstructure is not a popular suggestion. Williams observes that 'the term superstructure has been bandied about as a kind of swear-word' (Williams, 1963: 266) while Eagleton talks of himself as being part of a 'dwindling band' of believers in a formulation that is seen by some as plausible as 'belief in the Virgin Birth or the Loch Ness monster' (Eagleton, 2000: 237). Critics of the formulation suggest that in its rigidity, the theory is static and deterministic, drawing neat lines across society where no such lines exist (Eagleton, 2000; Allen, 2011). What such criticism seems to wish to diminish is that part of Marx's hypothesis which identifies, firstly, that such superstructures work, by their very nature, to manage affairs in the interest of the ruling class and, secondly, that, in Marx's own words, when 'the material productive forces of society come into conflict with …the framework on which they have operated hitherto' that this 'begins an era of social revolution' characterised by class struggle (Marx, 1859). As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the possibilities – indeed, the centrality - of resistance inherent in such theory sits uneasily with prevalent postmodern notions of meta-narratives that somehow rise above the need for organised struggle. Further to this, and of central significance to this particular study, are concepts of the creation of false consciousness which Marx sees as arising from a superstructure that results in individuals being 'reared of various and peculiar shaped feelings, illusions and habits of thought' which have an impact 'through tradition and education' and which seem to ensure that that the individual believes that they 'constitute the true reasons for and premises of his conduct' (Marx, 1852). Such potential acquiescence will inform a good deal of the argument that follows around teachers' autonomy.

Marxist ideas have enjoyed limited popularity or credence for decades. Historically, the horrors of Stalinism, Russian aggression in Hungary and

Czechoslovakia, the collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union and the actions of regimes in Cuba and Venezuela have been cited, particularly by western media and commentators, as proof-positive of the failure of Marxist ideas and socialist systems. Intellectually, the drive of postmodernism and the ubiquity in the academy of the post-structuralists in Europe have led to an almost ubiquitous abandonment of the notion of the grand narrative. Left-leaning politicians and political parties in Europe have, with few exceptions, distanced themselves from the actions of organised labour or the manifestations and actions of social movements. Much mainstream media has been comfortable with the notion of leftist figures, from trade union leaders to heads of state, as misguided if well meaning at best but, for the most part, as dangerous, subversive and out of touch with the real world.

Economically, there appears to be demonstrable proof that the dangerous experiments of the controlled economy have failed – albeit that many would argue that such systems are not anything that Marx himself would have recognised or advocated. The earliest – and strongest - proponents of neo-liberalism were confident that the potentially disastrous flirtation of western democracies with 'Fabian socialism and New Deal liberalism' (Friedman and Friedman, 1980: 331 and passim) were well intentioned but flawed approaches that must, inevitably, flounder. In his seminal work, Hayek draws what he sees as a clear correspondence between the growth of ideas about collective approaches to the organisation of society and the rise of Nazism, claiming that in Germany 'from 1914 onwards there arose from the ranks of Marxist socialism one teacher after another who led, not the conservatives and reactionaries, but the hardworking labourer and the idealist youth into the national-socialist fold' (Hayek, 1960:125). The depredations suffered in the economies of eastern Europe and the apparent willingness of these economies, and those of formerly Maoist China, to embrace the market seem to condemn Marx and his associated ideas to little more than historical curiosity.

The contention of this study is neither that a Pauline conversion from the leading western economies is imminent nor that the academy is about to

abandon its scholarly postmodernism to become active tribunes of the oppressed. The argument is, however, that Marxism provides a credible and sustainable theoretical basis for writing about modern society in general, and education in particular. Global economic developments have meant that, while not necessarily at the forefront of the consciousness of societal discourse, consideration of Marxist precepts cannot be summarily dismissed or condemned. At the time of writing, social movements have organised the occupation of areas surrounding Wall Street and parts of the City of London. Central squares in Madrid and Athens house protesters and strikers and the unequivocal target of such protest – and clearly named as such - is the capitalist system itself (Chomsky, 2012). While the global economic crash of 2008 and the crisis in the Eurozone of 2011 have prompted a questioning of the primacy of dominant ideological and economic orthodoxies, there is no suggestion here that disaffection with current circumstance leads to an adoption of Marxist ideas as a ready-made alternative. Nonetheless, the confidence of Hayek, the Friedmans and their many adherents that discredited Marxism will never resurface has been shown to be misplaced. As Eagleton (2011:xi) pithily suggests when explaining the revival of the term in general discourse; 'you can tell that the capitalist system is in trouble when people start talking about capitalism.'

Equally, Eagleton might have observed that such changes are just as recognisable when an internationally renowned academic publishes a work defending Marx under the auspices of an Ivy League university. The fact that press reports, with varieties of tone and emphasis, told of increased sales of *Das Kapital* in the weeks following the 2008 crash (Connolly, 2008; *The Daily Mail*, 2008; *The Times*, 2008) is a further suggestion of a growing interest. One could also argue that if the chief economics editor of the *Financial Times* is prepared to enter into open debate with a member of a Trotskyist organisation at a leading London university (*Youtube*, 2009) attended by some 300 people, then the notion that Marxism is a redundant doctrine would seem to be misplaced. Underpinning the protests, the ensuing debate and a revived interest in an apparently moribund political and economic creed is the widespread questioning of a system that appears to be failing so many whom

Hayek and Friedman hoped it would help to prosper. Economist Larry Elliott (2008) expresses this clearly when commenting on the seismic nature of the crash:

> Over and above the extraordinary individual events, there was the capitulation of the prevailing economic model. History will show that the great experiment with financial deregulation lasted from the first post-war oil shock in 1973 to the third oil shock in 2008.

I reiterate: none of the instances cited above means that the current discomfort with, and doubt about, the efficacy of the capitalist system leads inevitably to the embracing of Marxist ideas and philosophy. Such solutions sought by current social movements are rarely expressed in overtly political terms of any sort – let alone those based on the thinking of Marx. Nevertheless, the fracturing of the post-war consensus around the dominance of the market and neo-liberalism does, at the very least, render credible a study that sees merit in a theoretical position whose demise has, to borrow from Mark Twain, been greatly exaggerated.

2.3   The origins of neo-liberalism.

Neat definitions of economic theory are incapable of capturing the layers of argument and subtlety that are its component parts. Nevertheless, Harvey's (2005) comment that the roots of neo-liberalism lie in 'the assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade' and that this assumption is 'a cardinal feature of such thinking' (Harvey, 2005:7) provides a helpful starting point. Others (Harris, 2007; Hill, 2009; Hill and Kumar, 2009) draw the helpful distinction that what distinguishes neo-liberalism from classic, laissez-faire liberalism, with its fundamental belief in the correspondence between the common and the individual good, lies in the role and the intervention of the state. John Stuart Mill, the individual largely acknowledged in the West as the founder of modern liberal thought, envisages no role for the state in the pursuit of a free society:

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right. (Mill, 1859)

Interestingly, Mill's definition of classic liberalism may well have found favour with the group recognised as the originators of neo-liberal economic theory. The 1947 Mont Pelerin Society was founded by Friedrich Hayek as a response to the perceived threats to world-wide order posed by various post-war economic doctrines, most noticeably that of Keynes. Fearing a threat to the very fabric of the values of 'Western Man' the founding statement of the society expresses the concern that such threats were the result of a view of history that denied the existence of absolute moral standards and even brought into question the rule of law. Along with such concerns went a concomitant fear that the primacy of competitive markets would be undermined, the net effect of which would be a situation in which it would be 'difficult to imagine a society in which freedom may be effectively preserved' (Mont Pelerin Society in Harvey: 2005:20).

It is not difficult to interpret such a credo as an unapologetic assertion of the need to restore class power through economic and social control (Harvey, 2005; Hill, 2006) tolerating, if necessary, the very state intervention that should be anathema to such freedoms. As Harvey and others (Gamble, 1988; Rose and Miller,1992; Chang, 2003) point out, there is a degree of incoherence here in that the apparent commitment to a market economy, unfettered by state regulation or interference, sits uneasily with the necessity of a strong state that allows such freedoms to flourish. At times, the line between neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism can become somewhat blurred. The readiness of the United States to intervene, with main force if required, when its early economic interventions in central and south America risked failure, provide clear indications that for neo-liberalism to flourish, the state cannot be a neutral player. The willingness of Margaret Thatcher's

government to quell resistance and protest with shows of paramilitary force and a move away from a concept of policing by consent (Gamble, 1988) is further indication of this. Later paragraphs will go on to explain how this dichotomy in neo-liberal theory played out in social policy in general, and education policy in particular, in England.

It was in the United States that the growth of neo-liberal theory took hold after the second world war, bolstered by the expansion of major corporations whose reach and influence meant that countenancing direct state intervention in affairs of business became unconscionable. Given academic validity and respectability by the advocates of the Chicago school of economics, which, in itself, was later acclaimed through the award of the Nobel prize to its founder, Milton Friedman, in 1976 (Hayek had been similarly recognised in 1974), neo-liberal theory took hold and centralised itself in the formulation of all policy. However, even given the strength and influence of giant, developing US corporations, the question arises as to how, exactly, neo-liberalism became so hegemonic. Here the answer lies, in a way that is congruent with Marxist analysis, in the role of the state at the time of a period of economic growth and development throughout the 1950s and 60s. A salient feature of the way in which the state was determined to drive through its economic policies was the way in which it dealt with potential opposition. Dissident voices had been sent a clear and violent warning during the McCarthy era. Subsequently, much potential trade union power was subsumed as a feature of corporatism and was used, collusively, to dampen resistance or dissent (Hutchinson, 1957). As will be discussed at various points in this study, the oddity of the neo-liberal state that creates the conditions for the promotion of a market economy being dependent on that state showing its willingness to enforce and legislate, is a paradox that continues to resurface. Economic growth meanwhile – albeit not enjoyed universally– simultaneously pre-empted the requirement for any serious opposition to the status quo. In Britain in 1957 the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan was able to boast that 'most of our people have never had it so good' (BBC, undated) as an economic boom, allied to significant post-war social reforms such as the establishment of the National Health Service and universal secondary education, contributed to a de facto

acceptance of a free market economy. In such times of economic growth – and as long as such growth was controlled by US economic dominance through such apparatus as the Marshall Plan – neo-liberalism could expect quiet acceptance and consent. Beyond its economic base, neo-liberal thinking became reinforced through super-structural developments as corporations, the media, large parts of academia and various civil institutions coalesced to create a climate of opinion in its support (Harvey, 2005). However, as the relative calm of the two decades following the Second World War began to fracture and as questions arose about the efficacy of the free market, the advocates of neo-liberalism embarked on a period of energetic assertiveness and in this, the ideological closeness of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher became, as the next section explains, hugely influential.

2.4   From prescription charges to council houses to the 1988 Act: how neo-liberalism took hold in England.

In 1964 a Labour government under Harold Wilson took office for the first time in thirteen years. Extolling the virtues of new technologies that would be instrumental in freeing the economy from the thrall of the bankers, Wilson was in triumphant mood when addressing supporters on the eve of polling day. The old ways, Wilson asserted, were gone:

> You cannot go cap in hand to the central bankers as they (the former government) have now been forced to do, and maintain your freedom of action, whether on policies maintaining full employment here in Britain or even on social policies. The central bankers will be before long demanding that Britain puts her house in order and their ideal of an orderly house usually comes to mean vicious inroads in to the Welfare State and a one-sided pay-pause. (Foot, 1968:154)

Within three years of this address, Wilson's government had, in the face of a balance of payments crisis and mounting industrial unrest, been forced to reintroduce the prescription charges abolished in 1964, remove the provision of free milk in secondary schools, postpone plans for the raising of the school

leaving age and, most significantly, to devalue sterling. The programme of social reform built on technological advance that had been central to Labour's electoral promises, were the first sacrifices as the 'central bankers' expressed their nervousness about how such reforms could disturb the hegemony of market forces. Acting against the advice of his largely Keynseyan advisers, Wilson had, in Foot's words, in 'his first act as economic overlord…put an end even to his own meagre aspirations' (188). Much the same scenario was played out once more in 1976 when one of the principal conditions set by the International Monetary Fund for a fiscal rescue of James Callaghan's Labour government was to impose a significant increase in prescription charges. In terms of selecting a totemic social provision of the welfare state, the 'central bankers' of whatever hue and at whatever time, were clear in their appreciation of the significance of attacking this particular measure.

Callaghan's nervousness about the funding of education in straitened economic times is apparent in the 1976 Ruskin speech (Callaghan, 1976). Conscious of the fact that, in his words, he has been advised to 'keep off the grass, watch my language' he is unequivocal in his view that wider economic conditions must be recognised by the education system:

> There has been a massive injection of resources into education, mainly to meet increased numbers and partly to raise standards. But in present circumstances there can be little expectation of further increased resources being made available, at any rate for the time being. I fear that those whose only answer to these problems is to call for more money will be disappointed. But that surely cannot be the end of the matter. There is a challenge to us all in these days and a challenge in education is to examine its priorities and to secure as high efficiency as possible by the skilful use of existing resources.

Callaghan's speech is a symbolic turning point; it represents the juncture at which the traditional liberal view of education as a public good, a project that was fundamentally egalitarian and emancipatory (Harris, 2007), began its turn towards a neo-liberal outlook that that sees control of output, accountability

and, ultimately, value for money, as an intrinsic part of its purpose. In 1922 Labour's leading educationalist, R.H.Tawney, had written the seminal text *Secondary Education for All: A Policy for Labour* in which he envisaged a future where this egalitarian educational project was the precursor of a society unburdened by the effects of class and privilege. It is a measure of the reach of neo-liberal thinking to observe that, some fifty years later, a Labour Prime Minister, compelled by international markets to abandon the principle of subsidised medicine, could be forced into a marketized view of education that is the logical consequence of such policy determinants.

Some three years after Callaghan's Ruskin speech, he was succeeded by Margaret Thatcher and a Conservative government. Whereas Wilson and Callaghan had probably been forced reluctantly into the abandonment of centralised social policy, Thatcher went about dismantling it with ideological determination and gusto. Within a year of taking office, the Housing Act of 1980 (Legislation UK) gave tenants the right to buy social housing and thereby, effectively, make private that which had been public. In terms of an early message about the centrality of the market in the economic thinking of this new government, it is difficult to overstate the importance and impact of this measure. Bolstered by support from the US, where the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 gave further force to a monetarist, non-interventionist approach to social policy, Thatcher embarked upon a legislative programme that had the elements of widespread privatisation, attacks on the trades unions, and the tolerance of mass unemployment at its centre (Wolfe, 1991; Miller and Steele, 1993).

The formulation of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) (Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1988) was built upon the ideological – and economic - thinking of the previous decade and was a reflection of it. Composed of four separate but interrelated sections, the Act opened the way for a competitive, market-led approach to the provision of schooling in England that challenged all notions of the centrality of public service, intra-school collegiality and cooperation, as well as, crucially for this study, making the first steps towards

challenging the notion of teacher professionalism and autonomy. It is worth providing a brief outline of the four elements of the Act:

1. The National Curriculum. This identified specific programmes of study in a range of prescribed subject areas and was the first attempt by the state in Britain to impose its will in this way. An audit system delivered through national testing at four age-related points for children up to the age of 16, as well as an inspectoral system, underpinned this. The fact that the outcomes of both of these initiatives were to be made public re-emphasised the mandatory nature of this initiative. Significantly, schools in the private sector were exempted from all such obligations.

2. Open enrolment of school numbers. This measure diminished the role of local, elected authorities in allocating numbers to particular schools. Schools were permitted to make their own judgements about capacity and provision in a way that was no longer principally driven by regard for overall local planning. The consequences for admissions' policies were widespread as the market for places in successful schools was deregulated in this way.

3. The establishment of grant-maintained schools. This part of the legislation made provision for schools, having gained the consent of the current parental body, to remove themselves entirely from local authority control along with the transference of all undertakings. The 'grant' of the title would be funding from central government in lieu of the removal of services previously provided by local authorities. Schools were free to decide whether to buy-back such services and, in a clear promotion of free-market policies, from whom. As a consequence, the role of many local authorities changed from being providers of service to marketeers for such services.

4. Local Management of Schools (LMS). This, more than any other measure in the ERA, revealed the Thatcher government's plans for the organisation of education and set the tone for the normalisation of neo-liberal approaches to education in England which remain firmly in place at the time of writing – and which form the material base for the working lives of the teachers interviewed in this study. Under the terms of this measure, centralised funding was to be

removed from local authorities previously charged with the planning and resourcing of provision and devolved to individual schools. Each atomised unit was now responsible for itself, to rise or fall as circumstance saw fit. That one consequence of this was a polarisation of provision, with young people being the victims of such unequal provision, is another element that will emerge later in this study.

The ERA was legislation that reflected not only the neo-liberal politics of the time, but was also a manifestation of the prominence of the concept of New Public Management (NPM). Whether or not NPM was the direct and inseparable expression of the Thatcher–Reagan axis is open to question and debate (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994; Hood, 1995; Ferlie et al, 1996). What is indisputable, however, is the fact that every characteristic of NPM is reflected in the consequences of the ERA's implementation. Drawing the distinction between the progressive public administration, which had characterised public service in the post-war decades until the mid 1970s, and the growth and acceptance of NPM, Hood (1995) captures the essence of NPM as encapsulating shifts of emphasis away from policy making and due process to a situation in which management skills and measurable outputs assume prime importance. Other factors such as competitive tendering, localised pay-bargaining and a preference for short-term contracts are also characteristic of NPM.

The ERA embodied the quintessential spirit of NPM, which, in itself was the daily enactment of neo-liberal policies. As the effects of the Act began to filter into school life, I saw for myself (see the following section) by the early 1990s, as a teacher of some fifteen years at the time, how this played out in the classrooms that Jones (2007, above) considers untouched by such ideological shifts, and how managerialism and performativity dominated the discourse and practice in schools.

2.5   The triumph of human capital – and how schools became managed institutions.

What Dale (1989:128) calls the 'dominance of the old humanist tradition' of education withered under the attacks of neo-liberalism and NPM in the decades following the Ruskin speech and Thatcher's election. In the years after the introduction of the ERA, schools and local authorities implemented the Act's requirements with varying degrees of enthusiasm, encountering only occasional organised opposition from teachers and their trade unions (Coles, 1994; Jones, 1994; Berry, 2009). In England the 'policy discourse' (Ball, 2008:5) of the time was dominated by the ideas that social institutions were in a state of crisis and that any fiscal intervention at state level was entirely contingent upon 'value for money' – a term to be appropriated unapologetically at the time by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) the inspection body for schools. Schools and the education system could not expect to be immune from a realm in which the prevalence of such policy discourse had become so widespread and hegemonic. However, given the humanist tradition from which they had emerged, the adoption by education policy makers of the previously alien requirements of the world of economic drivers and new managerialism was often a clumsy affair. It is worth returning to Jones (2007) who, notwithstanding my reservations about his analysis of the ultimate reach of neo-liberal policy into individual classrooms, understands completely that the collision of these two worlds led to the forging of an uncomfortable partnership – the repercussions of which are at the very centre of this study. The reconciliation of the instincts of a profession suffused, still, with the tradition of humanism, to the world of economic indicators and hard-edged, measurable outcomes was, and remains, uneasy. Moreover, the economic and ideological drive of which ERA was born – and the manner in which this drive, under Thatcher, tolerated little opposition – led to a situation where education policy and practice was subject to reform which led to 'an imprecision about what sort of education may be produced by this unrelenting emphasis on methods most likely to produce the *increases in productivity* foreseen by this model' (Jones, 2007:247 - my emphases) was reinforced. It is in this very area of imprecision and uncertainty about what education is *for*

and what is *might be* that much of the professional dissatisfaction and frustration expressed by the respondents in the study that follows resides.

The following section which looks at the growth of the concepts of mangerialism and perfomativity, upon which this new economic model came to rely, might be leavened a little by first drawing some correspondence with my own experience of these times.

From a range of possibilities, three illustrations capture the move to economically driven managerialism. All three were the source of some amusement for practitioners at the time – and all are now normalised to the extent that they would elicit no surprise whatsoever. First was the possibility of staff appointments being made on the basis of cost. In a salary structure that was incremental and based on experience, it was entirely possible for posts at a similar grading to be allocated different salaries, dependent on the candidate's length of service. All salary costs fell to local authorities. The possibility, of schools operating under LMS saving money by considering such costs when making appointments seemed, when first mooted, to be risible. This is now commonly accepted practice. Second, much jovial speculation would be voiced at the notion that some headteachers would assume titles such as Director or even Executive and that such little teaching as they could currently manage would cease to be a realistic expectation. The non-teaching Head with 'Executive' as part of the job title is now commonplace, as a perusal of the relevant pages of educational job advertisements will demonstrate. Third, many teachers, including myself, were fazed by hearing their roles as academic heads of departments re-classified as those of 'middle managers.' Such descriptions are now ubiquitous (Carter and Stevenson, 2012; 492), with professional development courses entitled 'Leading From the Middle' serving as a good example of this normalisation. For all of these examples, however, the idea of companies sponsoring schools and their equipment, and assuming controlling stakes within them, was something too ridiculous to provide amusement for even the liveliest of speculators.

Such a shift in the nature of the superstructure - the cultural and intellectual aspects of how schools began to perceive and conduct themselves as institutions - has to be seen as the consequence of the prevalence of an economic model that had become firmly entrenched before the end of the century. The conflation of the public good with economic goals and such notions as Best Value – identified as a discrete concept in New Labour's Local Government Act of 1999 (Legislation, UK) - emphasised the underlying economic driver of all social policy, of which education was a part. Elements such as increased parental choice, albeit that this was somewhat piecemeal in reality (Whitty,1997) along with use of raw data to construct school league tables based on test results, further underlined the marketisation process. Against these developments, it is unsurprising as Ball (2008:47) observes, that 'the manager (becomes) the cultural hero of the new public service paradigm.' The question then arises, what it is, precisely, that the manager manages?

2.6   Performativity, reification and commodification.

Managers manage performance of workers and from this somewhat banal observation, the idea of performativity arises. Ball (2008:49) goes so far as to call performativity 'a culture or a system of terror' before going on to describe the way in which such a system has a daily impact upon the way in which teachers feel themselves controlled and, simultaneously, impelled to buy into a system of productivity that is used to measure the value of both their individual worth and that of their institution.

At a managerial level this culture of outcomes, outputs and scrutiny can only make sense if identifiable indicators are available. For working schoolteachers – the central subject of this study – this presents a problem as the testimony that follows from them will demonstrate. Wedded, sometimes unconsciously, to the notion of liberal humanism as opposed to human capital, the view of children as units of production, or schools as the business-like organisations that generate such products, represents an ontological challenge. None of this is to begin to suggest that schools and teachers have a disregard for the

business of preparing pupils for the wider and practical societal demands of work - as later comments from respondents clearly indicate. Williams (1961: 163) warns educators not to fall into the trap of privileging the humanist tradition at the expense of developing 'the absurd defensive reaction that all real learning' is undertaken through this tradition 'without thought of practical advantage' and this important facet does not escape the teachers in this study. Notwithstanding appreciation of this important and pragmatic consideration, faced on a daily basis with human beings and their foibles, whose ways of learning require a variety of pedagogical approaches, the need to produce predictable outcomes at given stages runs contrary to what most of them see as meeting the needs of such individuals. Yet, if schools feel the need to 'act as though they were businesses both in relation to clients and workers' (Ball, 2007:14) then somewhere there must be identifiable products to be measured and assessed. Policy discourses, both national and international, that embrace market-led ideologies, have proved themselves more than ready to address this problem.

The role of the headteacher requires some mention here. From a position where the traditional view of headteachers was as providers of educational leadership within a school, the nature of headship changed drastically as a more managerial model was required (Evetts, 1994). The work of Bolam et al (1995) underscores the way in which new headteachers at that time saw their role as being driven by managerial requirements. Weindling and Dimmock (2006) trace the way in which headship achieved by on-the-job training through an apprenticeship model after years of steady career progression moved towards the assumption of a role where managerial skills became more prevalent, validated through schemes in England such as the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and the emergence of the National College for School Leadership NCSL). This is underscored by Bright and Ware (2003) whose work demonstrates that those teachers who had arrived at headship through a career as classroom practitioners found that this was no preparation for a role which now required significant knowledge of managerial procedures and practices.

One of the principal facilitators of the construction of mechanisms for educational measurement is the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) established through the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1997. The involvement of the United Kingdom, and England in particular, in this exercise became critical to policy formulation after something of a stumbling beginning (Grek et al, 2009). The explanation of the nature and purpose of PISA, taken from the OECD website, is instructive:

> The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an internationally *standardised assessment* that was jointly developed by *participating economies* and administered to15-year-olds in schools. (My emphases)

Ball (2008:34) suggests that the OECD's position is consistent with the outlook and policy imperatives of a range of influential organisations from the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation to member states of the European Union, all of whom 'give overwhelming emphasis to the economic role of education' (13). The centrality of a concept of productivity in education, enhanced by the construction of an internationally approved system of comparison and stratification of outcomes, leads inevitably to a state of affairs where schools, and those who work in them, think of themselves in ways that diverge from those of the past. The establishment of such new goals and procedures serve, in a notion that borrows from Lyotard, to persuade those within a system to '"want" what the system needs in order to perform well' (Lyotard, 1984:62). The four components of the ERA set the conditions whereby schools ape the manners and characteristics of businesses; notions of performance and productivity predominate – and where such ideas hold sway, the need to manage, scrutinise and control cannot be far behind.

If the need to 'produce' becomes central - and if the institutional success and concomitant security of workers is dependent on such production - it is unsurprising if those workers, after Gramsci, consent to a degree of

domination. From here it is a logical step to embrace a pragmatic approach to the running and organisation of schools that, by necessity, meets the requirements of current market demands. The expression 'what works' examined so thoroughly by Alexander (2004) – and which is central to the discussion in the following chapter – and then echoed by Ball (2007, 2008) is a suitable dictum for practice that has emerged from the economic policies of the last forty years. The body of this study examines the views of those whose daily lives are enacted against this background.

2.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has traced some of the historical and political background to the way in which neo-liberal theory and practice has shaped the current priorities and preoccupations of schools in England. It has argued that as social policy per se found itself subject to the demands and requirements of market-led policy, it became inevitable that education would find itself similarly treated. In a market-led situation, where production and productivity are of central importance, it becomes necessary to formulate education in a way that it too, however speciously, must produce outcomes. From here, the following chapters examine the ramifications of how this base position has an impact on the way in which a super-structural discourse about curriculum and learning is formulated. It is argued that such discourse is diminished to conversation about how to demonstrate that 'standards' – the preferred policy indicator – can be achieved. The implications for teachers' autonomy of such reductive practice are of central importance to this study.

Chapter 3

From *pedagogy* to *curriculum* to *standards*: how the quest for standards became the only game in town.

This chapter makes a connection between the existence of the neo-liberal, market-led view of education outlined in the previous chapter and what is taught in classrooms in England. It begins by examining the concept of a curriculum per se and goes on, through reference to a range of literature, to argue that because of a reluctance to engage with pedagogy in England by policy makers and professionals, the idea of a curriculum has become reduced to a disparate and atomised entity, valued most for its ease of measurement and quantifiability. It concludes by making the connection with the subsequent chapter which looks at how this reductive view of the school curriculum makes an impact upon teachers as autonomous professionals.

3.1   Curriculum: a theoretical and conceptual framework

The section that follows starts the discussion about the way in which the concept of the curriculum has been transformed in the last thirty years from something that, although still engaging for educational commentators, now often rests upon a discourse of proven standards suitable more for market evaluation than an informed interest in the quality and direction of what is learnt and why.

The theoretical framework for this discussion draws on those who have examined questions of curriculum in the past and some of those who continue to do so. Young (1975) crystallises the discussion by characterising the dichotomy between 'curriculum as fact' and 'curriculum as practice' drawing, as he does so, on his own work and that of others (Greene, 1971; Whitty and Young, 1975; Freire, 1990). 'Curriculum as fact', correspondent with Freire's view (see below) of education as a 'depositing' exercise, is based on the idea of suitable knowledge being something outside the experience of the learner – an alien concept to be mastered and controlled with the help of a teacher. The

school curriculum becomes, as a consequence, something to be reified, organised and consumed. The use of the term 'deliver' did not become current in educational circles in England until after 1988; greeted with a degree of amusement by some practitioners at the time, despite its subsequent normalisation and ubiquity, it is a term that fits ideally with a concept that sees knowledge as something external to the learner in a subject-ordered world.

Conversely, and possibly less neatly, 'curriculum as practice' rests upon an appreciation and understanding of the idea that teachers and schools operate within circumstances created by human beings, in itself a development of the Marxist precept of the idea that it is not 'the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness' (Marx, 1859). Curriculum as practice presents possibilities for learners to make sense of their own world. This more challenging and open-ended view of what learning might be is, to say the least, inimical to a market-led view of education. It is also true to say that, notwithstanding the attempts of individual teachers and, occasionally, schools to operate such curriculum as practice, living examples are rare. The following illustration goes some way to explain why this may be.

Young (1975) cites the example of a curricular experiment in the north of England in 1973 (Layton, 1973) in which emphasis was placed on the sort of scientific skills and knowledge that were particularly germane to an area dominated by the cotton industry. The experiment was, however, short-lived and Layton suggests that this was:

> because it undermined the separation of teachers from those they were to teach and it was feared by the Inspectorate that those studying their own work context might come to see it too critically. Furthermore, it was felt that teachers…might become, as one inspector put it, 'active emissaries of misrule.' (Young, 1975: 135)

This presents an interesting comparison with the contemporary demonisation of, to take a salient example, media studies, one of the curriculum areas that have become the lightning rod for ideological attacks upon a perceived deterioration of 'standards'. That learners should understand the working of mass media that promote ideologies wedded to marketization is, naturally, of concern to the beneficiaries and advocates of such ideas. The views of the Secretary of State for Education shortly prior to his assumption of office in 2010 make revealing reading in this regard:

> Curriculum content should contain the classical canon of history, literature and scientific knowledge and we should pull back from seeking to make content more relevant to the contemporary concerns and lives of young people. Young people should be discouraged from pursuing newer or non traditional subjects like media studies, which are not seen as credible by the best universities. (Taylor, 2010)

The suspicion of a curriculum area here – which is amplified in the commitment to traditional subjects by the UK coalition government (see Chapter 6) - is based upon a mistrust born of ideology: the subject is not 'traditional' and does not conform to the requirements of the 'best' universities. In an ironic twist, it is treated with suspicion because it allows learners to meet the needs of a results-based system through accrediting them – and their schools – with increased numbers of examination passes which contribute to an institution's published profile of outcomes. It is not, though, the sort of knowledge that is respectable or valued – an observation that prompts the subsequent question: 'by whom?'

The answer to this question lies, at base, in consideration of a prevailing, but contested, notion of common sense. Such a notion, resting in its turn on the Marxist precept of dominant ideology, can be writ large when it is used as the guiding notion in schools. Bourdieu recognises this when he observes that 'it is clear that the school is …the fundamental factor in the cultural consensus in as far as it represents the sharing of a common sense' (Bourdieu, 1967:193) – an idea expanded upon by Apple (1975, 2004) who acknowledges the

difficulties faced by professionals who wish to challenge logical assumptions about education that remain unarticulated and entrenched. Apple understands that to challenge such notions takes the teacher into an area well beyond the application of particular techniques or approaches that could be locally applied, and into the dangerous area – for society's rulers – of what education and the curriculum may be for. In this he acknowledges Williams' (1973) seminal analysis of base and superstructure when applied to schools. Williams observes that if such entrenched notions of common sense were merely superficial, resistance to them would be a relatively simple matter:

> If what we learn were merely an imposed ideology, or if it were only the isolable meanings and practices of the ruling class, or a section of the ruling class, which gets imposed on others, occupying merely the top of our minds, it would be – and one would be glad – a very much easier thing to overthrow. (Williams, 1973: 205)

Apple points out that such practices are not just at 'the top of our minds' but layered and constructed in a way that could never be deemed neutral or free from ideology:

> The overt and covert knowledge found within school settings, and the principle of selection, organisation and evaluation of this knowledge, *are value-governed selections from a much larger universe of possible knowledge and selection principles.* (Apple, 2004: 43 – my emphases)

There is also an echo here of Althusser's notion of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) where he locates the organisation of the education system in any state as one of a number of measures that serve to ensure that in its quest to ensure the reproduction of labour power, the state requires of the labour force:

> not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order ….in

forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its practice (Althusser 1969:127 – original emphases)

The argument posited by the remarks above points to a super-structural analysis of how curricula develop and become entrenched at a level beyond something superficial where change could be effected by, for example, substituting one subject discipline for another – although that is not to deny some progressive possibilities by so doing. What curricula do is a reflection of what those who drive a dominant ideology want them to do: how this affects the daily lives of those practitioners interviewed as part of this work, who are charged with the delivery of such key messages, and the extent to which they have fully submitted to Althusser's rules of the established order, is at the very centre of this study. What appears to be undeniable, notwithstanding the range of reservations expressed by such practitioners, is that the formulation of 'curriculum as fact' is the prevalent notion and the one that drives their actions and those charged with framing their working conditions.

The discussion now moves to a consideration of how this selection from a larger set of curricular possibilities on the part of power has led to an ideologically driven decision to subjugate discussion of pedagogy to a consideration of how knowledge can be identified, measured, ordered and confined – and how, within a marketized system, this can be seen as a justifiable position to adopt in an unwavering drive towards the improvement of standards. In terms of the effect on teachers' professional autonomy these curricular choices and this predominance of the drive towards improved standards have clear implications.

3.2   Pedagogy and the school curriculum in England: uncomfortable bedfellows.

In terms of everyday practicalities, a consensus about what subjects should be taught in schools has emerged since the early twentieth century and has become normalised in England. The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) had

the effect of enshrining this in statute and although the introduction of such concepts as citizenship and personal health education now feature in schools' curricula, along with the centrality of the use of digital technology, the core of what is taught in schools has changed little since the 1944 Education Act had the effect of widening access to secondary education. This section goes on to argue that, despite this normalisation, a collection of discrete subjects does not a curriculum make and that the convenient shorthand of calling this collection a curriculum is a distortion - albeit one that is a perfect fit for a view of education that needs to meet the demands of a market-led system.

The origins of the school curriculum in England lie in the ambitions of what White (undated) refers to as 'the English Old Dissenters and Scottish Presbyterians in the 18th century.' A desire on the part of these worthy reformers to be 'orderly thinkers (and) classifiers' developed into the subject based curriculum that is prevalent to this day. As White, along with other commentators (Simon,1981; Alexander 2004, 2010) points out, this approach was gradually reinforced by the control of the examination system exercised in England by the principal universities. He captures the effects of this oligarchic situation in the wry observation that if Sanskrit, formal logic and the history of Persia were made compulsory for entrance to Oxford and Cambridge then academically able young people would determinedly set their mind to such disciplines. In a topical footnote to this, the UK coalition government is, at the time of writing, exploring the possibilities of universities reasserting such influence (Morgan and Wyatt, 2012).

White points to the peculiarity of 'curricular patterns which may have made some kind of sense a century or more ago' but which 'have now hardened into intra-school activities' (White, 2004:179) which no longer have relevance or applicability. He talks of the folly of seeing the curriculum attempting to 'atomise and itemise knowledge as if what is taught….were akin to historical dates or the periodic tables' (68) and, ultimately, bemoans the political control of education from 'those of all stripes' who 'have become addicted to the assessment regime' (White, 2004: 180). Above all, as the title of his undated article indicates, he believes that working towards an 'aims-led curriculum'

would be a more fruitful approach. This, of course, begs the question as to precisely *whose* aims might lead such a curriculum and reveals a circularity in this argument. This lies in the fact that although various manifestations of the National Curriculum may talk in terms of the education of the whole child, as White has already acknowledged, politicians and policy makers are 'addicted' to assessment regimes. In real-politick terms, assessment *is* the aim. In an echo of the anecdote that begins this study, Stenhouse (1975), writing at a time before the ERA and the prevalence of measurement had even been fully conceptualised, warns that 'Hamlet must not be justified as a training ground for literary skills' (Stenhouse, 1975: 83) and cautions against the use of distorting content in order to meet objectives. Such warnings, it appears, have gone unnoticed and unheeded by successive governments.

Elliott (2011) expands upon Stenhouse's ideas when considering the persistent wrangle in England over whether the purpose of the curriculum is to meet the needs of the whole child or, rather, to introduce the child to a raft of individualised subjects, characterising this as 'the seesaw curriculum'. He argues that the license enjoyed by schools and teachers in the 1960s and 1970s gradually became eroded as the requirement to yield 'the high levels of achievements that that have economic commodity value in labour markets' (Elliott, 2011:15) became the central feature of policy formulation. However, he argues that such a dichotomy is a false one, bred of a reluctance to use pedagogical understanding to unite these apparently disparate agendas. Citing Bruner (1999) and Dewey (1904), Elliott talks of how the former draws distinctions between the use of specific subjects as mere didactic exposure to facts and principles to be reiterated when required and the use of these subjects in an inter-disciplinary way to prompt dialogue and learning. Similarly, Dewey sees subjects as 'resources for thinking about the problems of living in society' as opposed to 'infallible wisdom detached from the pursuits of everyday life' (Elliott, 2011: 23). The argument over the centrality and value of subject disciplines is also central in the work of Hirst (1965) who envisaged the basis of liberal education as being characterised by the pursuit of various kinds of propositional knowledge for non-instrumental reasons (White, 2005). That Hirst's work - which made an influential contribution to the academic

debate around the curriculum in the following decades and with which he continued to engage (Elliott, 1987) - should acknowledge the significance of this lack of instrumentalism is, in itself, significant. The seesaw, Elliott argues (2011), is now firmly weighted on the side of individual subjects and is a model with which the English education system has persisted, notwithstanding the fact that it 'fails to engage and motivate a significant proportion of the nation's children' (2011:21). This triumph of instrumentalism over pedagogical theory appears to be a clear indication of the sidelining of such theory in favour of the production of identifiable, if questionable, outcomes.

For working professionals in schools in 2012, the term curriculum remains stubbornly inter-changeable with the notion of a menu of assessable subjects. This readily accepted, but flawed, notion of the curriculum being little more than the aggregation of discrete subjects is at the bottom of the friction between academics, pedagogues and policy makers. Freire (1990) talks in 1972 of how, under capitalism, education

> becomes an act of depositing, in which students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communication, the teacher issues communiqués and 'makes deposits' which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat (Freire, 1990:45).

Freire's view of how such a system – which he calls 'systematic education' – has been allowed to flourish is based on a Marxist analysis in which he sees the 'oppressed' of his volume's title as having been conditioned by a social reality framed by an inimical ruling elite. What is taught, how it is taught and the concomitant rewards for those who comply with this 'systematic' approach are, for Freire, a sharp reflection of how education operates under capitalism. He goes on to argue that only a true understanding of pedagogy, or what he calls 'educational projects', can begin to dismantle this restricted and restrictive view of what currently happens to learners. For Freire this pedagogy has its roots in what he calls 'a concept of men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness directed towards the world'

(1990:52). White expresses this in less grandiose terms when he talks in his undated article about a curriculum that should attempt to transcend specialised subjects and concentrate on fostering the personal qualities required for life in the twenty-first century. (As an interesting aside, however, one imagines some tension between what White may regard these qualities to be, which largely comply with accepted and respectable societal norms, as opposed to Freire's rather more revolutionary aspirations for society.)

Freire's identification of privileging packaged, atomised systems over an approach to learning that is not directed by the topical requirements of a ruling elite are reinforced by Simon's seminal article *Why no pedagogy in England?* (Simon, 1981) written some nine years later. Like Freire and White in their different ways, Simon identifies the imposition of the 'social-disciplinary ('containment') function of education' (1981:12) in the early twentieth century as the base from which contemporary models of schooling are built. He specifically locates what he sees as the discrediting of pedagogy as a class-based development, rooted in social, political and ideological reasons which, in an echo of the example from Layton's example from cotton town cited above, mean that education is characterised by a situation where 'ideas preaching the limitation of human powers (are) in the ascendant' (1981:14).

By 2004, Alexander felt it necessary to revisit Simon's article by asking why there was 'still no pedagogy' (Alexander, 2004) and went on to answer his own question by talking of how an 'era of centralisation and tight political control' had effectively excluded 'any sense of how pedagogy connects with culture, social structure and human agency and thus acquires educational meaning' (Alexander, 2004:10). He goes on to argue that 'the prominence of curriculum in English educational discourse has meant that we have tended to make pedagogy subsidiary to curriculum' (2004:11) and that, as a result, debate and investigation about pedagogical matters is reduced to nothing more than a consideration – and usually an acceptance of – 'what works.' By 2010 Alexander, is no more sanguine about an argument that he sees as 'resolutely polarised as ever' (Alexander, 2010:2) and finds little to be optimistic about in the early intentions of the new UK government which, as

he sees it, do little more than revisit exhausted arguments about the primacy of skills as opposed to subjects, culminating in 'the ultimate pedagogical nonsense' (2010:3) of an imagined division between teaching and learning.

White and Alexander, along with a range of other commentators whose views will be examined later in this chapter, are clear that historical arrangements, driven by the political imperatives of ruling classes and, in turn, reinforced by the market-led demands of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, have led us to a position where broad considerations of what education might be are reduced to the narrow measurement of what it is. The elision of curriculum and subjects along with the sidelining of pedagogy are manifestations of this.

The policy of the coalition government contained in the White Paper (DfE, 2010f), about which Alexander expresses such misgivings, is unequivocal in its commitment to subjects and gives further weight to the argument that Simon's 1981 question remains stubbornly unanswered. A section whose very title - 'Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications' - demonstrates a reflection of the unhelpful conflation of these different entities, is illuminating. Starting by articulating a commitment to 'reduce unnecessary prescription, bureaucracy and control' (DfE, 2010f:40) it goes on to promise that 'a new review of the National Curriculum will...have a greater focus on subject content' (2010f:42). It then goes on to explain that against this promised lack of prescription, Ofsted, the principal regulatory body in schools, will look to 'recognise particular features of systematic synthetic phonics teaching' (2010f:43) as if such an approach were uncontested in the academic community – which is not the case (Wyse and Gosnami, 2008). In the same paragraph as advocating the pursuit of 'a *broad and rounded* range of academic subjects until the age of 16' (2010f:44 - my emphases) it goes on to prescribe exactly what this range will look like: 'English, mathematics, science a modern or ancient foreign language and a humanity such as history or geography' (2010f:44). Within the space of a few paragraphs, therefore, we have the oddity of a promise of a less restricted approach coupled with a clearly

expressed preference for both methods of teaching and the content of the curriculum.

The situation outlined above can be summarised in the following way; the elision and conflation of subject and curriculum result from a view of education that is bound up with a particular ideological perspective. If educationalists believe that a curriculum should be driven by aims rather than assessment – and the data obtained from working schoolteachers dealt with later in this study indicate that this would certainly be their preference – then this places the battle for the ownership of this curriculum firmly in the political arena. This forces us to return to the question posed earlier; whose aims? As Young (1998) points out, 'curriculum debates, implicitly or explicitly, are always about alternative views of society and its future' (1998:9) and goes on to capture the essence of this question perfectly in a passage that is worth quoting at length:

> To ask (questions about the construction of the curriculum) is to consider how definitions of success arise and are legitimised through methods of assessment, selection and organisation of knowledge. However, to treat such definitions as objects of study raises not just theoretical and methodological questions: it also raises political questions about the distribution of power and the ability of some to define what counts as educational success. (1998:14)

What is clear is that to consider the argument about the (non-existent) pedagogical base of English curricula for at least the last thirty years since Simon's article reveals an obsession with measurement and measurability which are themselves the stock-in-trade of market ideology. Individual governments of all persuasions – and, indeed, many of the individuals who comprised such governments - would quite probably feel affronted at the prospect of their approach being branded as anti-intellectual. However, their collective unwillingness to engage with complex arguments about the study of pedagogy, or their acceptance of a clumsy correspondence between subjects and curriculum, are not merely unhappy accidents. To engage with such debate is to risk exposing unwelcome arguments. Better, in terms of

controlling measurable outcomes and 'production' to espouse, however implicitly, a model that distances itself from such complexities. Busher (2006) captures how this works for such governments in the following way:

> In the neo-liberal and quasi-economic framework that dominates national discourses about society and about education as part of that, knowledge seems to be defined as a product from a factory process (like a computer) called schooling rather than a sense-making process through which people create understandings of the different worlds around them. (Busher, 2006:107)

In an earlier section, in which he talks of how the intellectual, social and emotional needs of teachers and students are subjugated to their roles which focus 'on their performances as members of and producers for their schools as corporations' (2006:15), Busher mirrors the views of many of those interviewed as part of this study who see the production of results as central to their professional standing and reputation. Informed discussion about the nature and purposes of pedagogy and the curriculum fall victim to the requirements of quantitative assessment. When Young (1998) cites Weber's concept of the bureaucratic domination of education, he points to such quantitative assessment as being 'the major constraint on what counts as knowledge in modern societies' (Young, 1998:14). Against this analysis, it is not difficult to see why it is in the interest of neo-liberal governments to keep lively discussion about curricula under wraps as far as possible.

In an interesting footnote to this section it is worth remarking on the fact that if my own conversations with student teachers, and those of colleagues from a range of institutions, are a suitable measure by which to judge, the seminal works of Bruner, Dewey and Freire cited above, rarely seem to make their way onto programmes of teacher education which are almost always dubbed as 'training' and characterised by an instrumentalist approach. Simon's 1981 article is often given to training teachers as an early piece of reading as they embark on courses which, ironically, are themselves sometimes devoid of any sustained consideration of pedagogy in their drive to demonstrate that a set of

measurable standards has been achieved. The work of Stenhouse (1975) on curriculum research and development in which he perspicaciously observes at that time that 'we do not *have* objectives: we choose to conceptualize our behaviour in terms of objectives' (Stenhouse, 1975: 71 – original emphases) lies unopened on the shelves in university education departments – of the eight copies in my own institution, none had been issued since 1996. In the light of this, the next section looks in some detail at how the centrality of standards subsumed all other elements in current educational discourse in England.

3.3   How standards achieved primacy: the side-lining of debate about pedagogy or curriculum

As a working practitioner with twelve years' experience, the evolution of the National Curriculum by 1988, particularly in my own subject of English, proved a compelling, if sometimes irritating, drama. That it had proved to be just as dramatic for those charged with assembling it also became grippingly apparent within a few years as those involved revealed the machinations behind its construction (Cox, 1995). However once the detail of the National Curriculum had been scrutinised and considered, teachers went about their usual cheerful job of careful selection, judicious omission and the pursuit of the effectively familiar that characterised Dale's concept of licensed autonomy (1989). Writing in 1992 – one imagines before the publication of the 1992 Education Act (Education (Schools) Act, 1992) – Bowe and Ball were optimistically able to think of the National Curriculum as offering a 'micro-political resource for teachers, LEAs and parents to interpret, re-interpret and apply to their particular social context' (Bowe and Ball,1992:19). The idea that there was leeway for teachers to interpret and to place local emphases on their curricular choices in the years immediately after the 1988 ERA was not outlandish: as the head of a large department I did so and encouraged others to do so. Any consequences of non-compliance in terms of league-table ratings and publicly available inspection reports were a thing of the future.

That future, and its legacy into the second decade of the next century, was embodied in the 1992 Education Act referred to above. In an extrapolation of the social policies of the previous decade, which had seen the state systematically and unwaveringly confront trade unions, including those representing teachers, the Act introduced the twin instruments of inspection and open publication of information about schools that continue to dominate the discourse of teachers interviewed nearly twenty years after their inception. That the individual appointed by 'Her Majesty ... to the office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England' (Education (Schools) Act 1992) happened to be a figure, Chris Woodhead, who 'appeared to take a positive delight in criticising teachers and as a result ...became something of a hate figure in schools up and down the country' (Gillard, 2011) was a setting of the tone for the punitive nature of this legislation as teachers saw it. The publication of the Act which enabled the Secretary of State to exercise powers to publish information to 'assist parents in choosing schools for their children', 'increase public awareness of the quality of the education provided' and to assess 'the degree of efficiency with which the financial resources of ...schools are managed' was the point at which the neo-liberalism and marketization of school provision made an unavoidable impact for teachers at all levels.

Albeit that the establishment of the National Curriculum prompted much discussion within the teaching profession, it was other, inter-related, elements of the 1988 ERA – referred to in detail in Chapter 2 - that combined with this to cement the reality of the market in English schools by the early 1990s. Provision for open enrolment sidelined the role of local authorities and allowed schools to recruit beyond formerly agreed capacities. Beyond this, schools could opt out of local control should they choose to do so and, crucially, all schools were to enjoy a degree of financial independence and control through measures to devolve funding for central services to school level, with buy-back of such services as an option. Thus, against a background of competition between schools for parental approval, alongside an inspection regime that demanded value for money and measurable results, the language

of standards and results completely subsumed discourses about either pedagogy or curriculum.

The drive to demonstrate that standards had been achieved and, just as importantly in an open market, that there was 'evidence' to prove this, became ubiquitous. Quicke, as early as 1988, reinforced the concerns of Freire and Simon, warning about thinking that equated a collection of subjects with a properly formed curriculum. He foresaw, too, how those he identified as 'new right' neo-liberals put the market before pupils' learning, expressing concern that any worthwhile curriculum could 'not possibly be delivered in a climate where pedagogical innovation was constrained by teachers having to work to pre-specified objectives and where there was so much emphasis on bench-marks' (Quicke, 1988:14). Some ten years later and two years into New Labour's first government, the observations of Davies and Edwards (1999) confirm some of the worst fears of earlier commentators when they note that the National Curriculum was constructed from a suite of inherited subjects under the assumption that a coherent entity would emerge from the sum of these individual parts and that, in their view, no such coherence developed. They go on to identify how, under New Labour '"standards" ...replaced "curriculum" as the discursive hub of educational policy making' (1999:268). Most pertinently, and in a comment that resonates with the thinking of the 2010 coalition government in its schools' White Paper (Department for Education, 2010f), Davies and Edwards recognise the centrality of a phrase that came to haunt teachers – as well as a range of other professionals – 'best practice.' The assumption behind the ability of a group of professionals to replicate such best practice is the notion that teaching is 'a techno-rational activity, the underlying mechanics of which can be revealed through appropriate research and then universally applied in the classroom' (1999:269). Such a view leaves little room for the problematic business of considerations of content or pedagogy; if 'standards' are achievable through tried-and-tested practices, then what need debate about such matters?

A brief analysis of some of New Labour's policy documents from the early part of the century further illustrates the relegation of the importance of pedagogy.

Even in a document entitled *Pedagogy and Practice* (Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF), 2004) attention to the latter element far outweighs the former. The introduction to the document, aimed at working teachers, is entirely transactional in tone and content: the techniques (sic) illustrated are, we are told, 'tried and tested' (DCSF, 2004:2) and completing units from the document could be gathered 'in your portfolio (to) count as points towards accreditation of an MA or…membership of a professional body' (2004:2). We are told that the application of these techniques will produce more 'effective teachers (i.e. teachers whose students made stronger gains on standardized achievement tests)' (2004:24). All of this, we are assured has been identified by 'researchers.' Pertinently, in a document aimed at secondary teachers and published in 2004, of the seven titles referenced, three have their research basis in primary school and six of the titles predate the 1988 ERA, some quite significantly. A year earlier, *Excellence and Enjoyment* (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003) had exhorted primary teachers to 'be creative and innovative in how they teach' but is clear about the requirement to 'use *tests and targets* to help every child to develop his or her potential' which will 'help the school to improve and help parents and the public to understand the progress of the pupils and the performance of the school' (DfES, 2003:7 - my emphases). Apple (2004) summarizes the way in which standards become the currency in a marketized system in the following comment, worth quoting at length:

> The neo-liberal emphasis…is on making the school either part of the economy or making it into a commodity itself….as has happened in England, where their national curriculum is sutured into the national test (the results of which are published a 'league tables' in the press and elsewhere in which schools are compared), this provides a direct mechanism that enables the Right, in essence, to put price tags on schools and say 'This is a good school, this is a bad school.' In essence, it enables them to say 'There's no more money to support real efforts at democratic school reform, so what we need to do then is marketize.' (Apple, 2004:197)

The logical, long-term response to this is a retreat into techno-rationalism for many teachers. Lowe (2007), charting popular professional reaction through an analysis of letters and columns in the contemporary educational press, identifies that curriculum development is a natural casualty in a situation where 'the initiative had been taken away from (teachers) in matters of classroom practice' (Lowe, 2007:102). Jones et al (2008) cite the reaction of teachers working in an environment that 'enjoyed a reputation for radical curricular initiative' acceding to a 'discourse around accountability' (2008:181). When talking of teachers' professional development, White (1998) identifies a 'shift in provision ...from a *professional* model to an *institutional* model' (1998:163 - original emphases). Davies and Edwards (1999) characterise New Labour's vision of education as one whose main goal is the instrumental one of 'ensuring economic success in an increasingly global market' (1999:271). Lowe (2007) in his analysis of media treatment of education selects this telling section from the business section of the *Observer* newspaper to demonstrate the naked marketization of schools and schooling:

Outsourcing specialists organise everything from recruiting teachers to organising payrolls, ordering stationery and IT supplies and maintaining classrooms.. Companies are beginning to flex their muscles… For the City 'education support' is a growth sector…Capital Strategies believe this sector will grow from 1.6 billion today to 5 billion within five years. (Lowe, 2007:138)

The background formed by inspection, league tables and accountability - all driven by a commitment to the market – diminish the importance of pedagogical discussion or curricular aims and initiatives. That this market ideology may be espoused unwillingly, and often unwittingly, by those charged with teaching and the organisation of schools, is immaterial: the prevailing orthodoxy became impossible for practitioners to ignore by the end of the century and the election of New Labour in 1997 did nothing to unpick the neo-liberalism of its predecessors. Little wonder that by 2010 Alexander, once sufficiently recognised as one of 'three wise men' charged with advising on education policy by the Conservative government in 1992, can scarcely

contain his ire towards a Labour government that had so confused pedagogy with the pursuit of measurable standards:

> Children have a right to an education in which each aspect of the curriculum is taught to the highest possible standard regardless of how much or little time is allocated to it, and regardless of whether it is formally tested (Alexander, 2010:9).

Alexander's apparent annoyance at the disregard shown for any consideration about what the standards' agenda does for the educational experience of young people serves as a good starting point for the next part of this study which looks at what this means for the professional autonomy of teachers.

3.4   Chapter summary

This chapter has traced the way in which policy in England has become dominated by the need to demonstrate that a set of standards has been achieved. The priority of meeting such standards drives to the margins meaningful consideration of theories about pedagogy or the curriculum: such considerations cloud and complicate the clarity of purpose needed to attain standards. This marginalisation of theory and pedagogy becomes, as a result, normalised and entrenched in practice. In a telling current development, the coalition government's proposals for reforming teacher training in England (DfE, 2011a) has no single mention of either theory or pedagogy, one single reference to curriculum and five separate references to standards. The hollowing out of the education of beginning teachers, with the effective removal of reference to the commentators and theorists cited above, paves the way for the techno-rationalist approach that sits comfortably with a market-led model of production and delivery. The fundamental argument of this thesis is thus reinforced: consideration of pedagogy accedes to a dominant discourse of standards; debate about curriculum becomes reduced to a squabble over which menu of subjects is currently valued; measurement, systems and organisation become prime movers and the place of teacher

autonomy against these conditions – the central issue of this study – emerges as an area of acute interest.

This chapter and that which has preceded it have argued that the pervasiveness of neo-liberalism has had its effect on notions of the curriculum. The next chapter goes on to trace the way in which the autonomy of teachers has been affected by this in general terms. Consideration is then given to the super-structural expression of this particular base in terms of the formulation of policy. This lays the foundation for the collection and analysis of data which reveal how this is played out in teachers' professional lives and what, in turn, this may tell us about implications for future policy and practice.

Chapter 4

From licensed to managed autonomy

The previous two chapters contextualise the way in which teachers currently find themselves operating against a political and economic background characterized by acceptance of neo-liberal policies. Further to this, the way in which discourse about pedagogy and curriculum has been affected, and diminished, was considered. This next chapter discusses the impact of these ideas on the concept of teacher autonomy. It draws upon a wide range of literature, considering, in a chronological way, how commentators, largely from the UK, have theorised the notion of teacher autonomy. It reaches the conclusion that there has been a gradual erosion of professional autonomy as a result of the growth of marketization and commodification outlined in these earlier chapters. Subsequent chapters will move on to an investigation of how this manifests itself in the experience of the study's respondents, having first considered the ideological provenance of policy formulation arising from these material conditions before examining the detail of such policy itself.

4.1   Professionalism and autonomy

The notion and analysis of professionalism has been fiercely contested for the best part of a century and it is not the purpose of this thesis to revisit or rehearse that particular debate at any great length. As a term in everyday use, it has come to find itself associated with anything from surgery to bricklaying (Fournier,1999). Teachers guard the notion of themselves as professionals with intensity and their role as professional people is central to the way in which most define themselves, with those interviewed in this study privileging a notion of service to others above all else in their definitions. Hoyle and John (1995) recognise the importance of how service is at the centre of teachers' conception of their professionalism, speaking of 'the omnipresence of the term in every staffroom (which) illustrates their determination to maintain not only their self concept, but also their belief in the power and efficacy of their own judgement' (Hoyle and John, 1995: 43). However, for a concept that is so

freely discussed in such staffrooms, and as a term so important to teachers, the acceptance of a shared definition is hard to pin down. For the purposes of this study, Haug and Sussman's (1969) definition of an autonomous worker having 'the right to determine work activity on the basis of professional judgement' - which professionalism, in its turn, is based on 'a store of esoteric knowledge and service orientation' (1969:153) - is apt when applied to how teachers appear to understand the term.

Theorising the notion of autonomy within professionalism per se can be contextualised beyond the world of schools and teachers. When Randle (1996) cites Roth who, as early as 1974, remarks that defining professionalism is 'a futile game which has been mercifully abandoned' (Randle,1996:14), it is difficult not to believe that this was somewhat optimistic. However, despite the apparent durability of debates around professionalism, it is the extent of professional *autonomy* that is at the centre of this particular study. In an extrapolation of the argument beyond a consideration of professionalism, Randle draws on the work of Meiksins (1985) and Bailyn (1985) to consider a clear correspondence between notions of professionalism and those of autonomy. The work of the latter in particular, draws the helpful distinction between 'strategic' and 'occupational' autonomy – a distinction that has echoes and multifarious variations in the works of commentators that are examined later in this section. In terms of this thesis, this sets the tone well: Bailyn's formulation suggests that strategic autonomy resides in the freedom to set one's own agenda, where occupational autonomy is the freedom, once a problem has been set, to resolve it by means of one's own determination - in this instance in the world of pharmaceutical research. In a further study that looks at teachers in the Further Education (16-19) sector, Randle and Brady (1997) identify New Public Management (NPM) – discussed in the previous chapter – as a principal force in undermining professional autonomy, locating this threat in the way in which NPM requisitions the language of low cost, product delivery when talking of educational practice. This, in its turn, raises arguments about de-skilling which, in themselves, draw upon the earlier theorising of Braverman (1974) who talks of workers who 'have the illusion of making

decisions by choosing among fixed and limited alternatives designed by a management which deliberately leaves insignificant matters open to choice' (1974:39). In a summary of how all of this has an impact on the workers at the centre of their own studies, Randle and Brady capture this by referring to the way in which burgeoning managerialism leads to a 'degrading (of) the expertise that underpins autonomy to make choices about pace, extent of digression and the other elements which characterise teaching styles' (1997:235). This notion of autonomy within pre-set parameters is one that will resurface frequently in both the section that follows and in the remarks of respondents themselves. The identification of it sets the tone for much of this study: the paradoxical and complex notion of autonomy within limiting boundaries is at the centre of the investigation.

4.2   Teachers and labour theory of value

Some five years after Callaghan's Ruskin speech, Ozga and Lawn (1981) were instrumental in initiating debate about the proletarianization of teachers that has since formed something of a reference point for ensuing discourse around de-skilling and erosion of autonomy (Kean, 1989; Hatcher, 1994; Hoyle, 2001). Central to the debate are varying conceptions in relation to arguments around whether or not teachers produce surplus labour, profit or commodities. At the very base of this discussion is the contested class location of teachers. Ozga and Lawn shun the temptation of placing teachers into a 'new middle class', posited by some commentators as a convenient location for those who could be seen to be near collaborators in state projects, having assumed the ideology of that very state. For Ozga and Lawn, as well as for Apple (1981, 1986, 2004), a combination of circumstances helps to clarify teachers' class position – and this is one which rejects the arguments that teachers, along with other white-collar workers, have been manipulated and controlled by the state through notions of professionalism and license (Dale, 1989) into a position where their interests cut them off from the working class who they gradually come to recognise as 'their natural allies.' (Ozga and Lawn, 1981: 118). The question as to whether or not teachers are productive or unproductive, the producers of surplus value or, indeed, of commodities,

remains complex and challenging, particularly when applying classic economic determinants. Notions of invisible rather than material commodity or the reproduction of variable capital which, of themselves feed into super-structural manifestations that serve the needs of capital, go some way to resolving this problem (Ozga and Lawn, 1981).

A fascinating aside in terms of this particular thesis, written in the early twenty-first century, is Ozga and Lawn's citing of Marx's view about teaching in private establishments as being of limited, albeit interesting, value in terms of resolving the question of teachers' class location:

> If we may take an example from outside the sphere of the production of material objects, a schoolmaster is a productive labourer when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his scholars, he works like a horse to enrich the school proprietor. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of a sausage factory, does not alter the relation. (Marx, 1867 in Lawn and Ozga, 1981)

Writing some thirty years prior to the implementation of government policy that encourages owners of large businesses to become school sponsors (Middleton, 2009), one can excuse these authors for missing a correspondence between teachers and the production of surplus value that was yet to be enacted in this way.

Further arguments are pursued as to whether theorising teachers' work within paradigms of the labour process theory are credible and if, indeed, such a theory remains valid whether applied to teachers or any other group of workers (Hassard et al, 2001). Harvie (2006) contends that teachers are, indeed, productive labourers who produce surplus value, while Carter and Stevenson (2012) counter that such a characterisation cannot hold because students are not commodities. For Apple (1981, 1986), along with Ozga and Lawn, the proletarianization of teachers seems to be a much more clear-cut concept. These authors identify the classroom, the very locus of the teacher's everyday work experience, as somewhere which had once been a domain

over which the teacher exercise a degree of control and which increasingly, even as early as the beginning of the 1980s, was a place where opportunities for autonomy were gradually closed down as the experience of the veteran, curriculum planning and meeting the needs of individuals and groups of young people became less necessary - or desirable – in a tightly controlled and managed system, itself subject to quality controls of however dubious a value. While Apple cites research to demonstrate that – as will be referred to later in this thesis - teachers engaged in some quiet subterfuge as they go about subtly changing pre-figured objectives 'so that it fitted the regularities of the institution and prior practices that had proven successful' (Apple, 1986:37) such attempts to control their work were limited both in their immediate scope and in terms of generating the solidarity that might effect significant, wider change.

Two other, inter-related, aspects of the theorising of teachers' work in terms of labour theory require mention: intensification and the extent of managerial control. Apple argues that in times of fiscal crisis, 'we should expect that there will be attempts to further rationalize managerial structures and increase the pressure to proletarianize the labor (sic) process' (Apple, 1986; 31) and that such pressure will have its impact on teachers along with a range of other state employees. This intensification manifests itself through the proliferation of management systems, the use of pre-specified competencies, a predilection for standardised testing and, ultimately, to a situation where the labour process of teaching is susceptible to processes similar to that imposed on a whole range of workers. In terms of locating the contradictory class position of teachers, even given Apple's qualification that not all teaching can be 'unpacked' (34) by examining it in this way, the centrality of intensification and managerialism – both of which emerge as being of immediate importance for respondents in this study - go some way to forming a conceptual base from which to examine teachers' autonomy.

 Whatever the nuances of the argument around what is, essentially, the class position of teachers or the conceptual framework that best explains this, there emerges a degree of consensus from critics and commentators around two

essentially Marxist precepts – both of which are relevant to this particular study.   First among these is the proposal that in order, to paraphrase Marx himself, for the restless pursuit of profit to be satisfied, the notion of greater productivity from workers must be prosecuted. For the respondents in this study, complaint about the relentless, demanding nature of 'production' – principally in the form of test results – is one of the most salient features of the data gathered. Further to the centrality of this notion of increasing the rate of production is the importance, from the viewpoint of the ruling class, of exerting control over the workforce in order for the state 'to convert the purchased labour power of teachers into realized labour and, under conditions of neo-liberal globalized competition, to contain its cost' (Carter and Stevenson, 2012; 484). Such arguments underpin the discussion about teacher autonomy that follows by framing consideration of such autonomy firmly within the argument about how teachers' working conditions are the results of wider material conditions which are themselves characteristic of dominant ideology.

4.3   The beginning of the end for licensed autonomy

Earlier chapters recognised that until Callaghan's 1976 Ruskin speech the state had taken an almost peripheral interest in what actually occurred in the 'secret garden' of education as long as schools broadly fulfilled the requirement to satisfy the need to build the nation's workforce. In that, little had changed since Cole's earlier of observation of 1938 (see Chapter 1). The seminally important education Acts of 1944 and 1988 had drawn clear connections between education and economic policies (Jones, 2008a) but it was only the latter Act that actually began to open up genuine possibilities of encroachment into the workings of a teacher's classroom. Dale (1989) suggests that until that point teachers had enjoyed a degree of 'licensed autonomy', meaning that they would be left alone to do as they felt best until anything apparently outlandish such as a Risinghill or William Tyndale – schools whose very existence and actions appeared to challenge all accepted values and precepts - came along (Limond, 2002). This, Dale argues, gives way increasingly to a 'regulated autonomy' encapsulated in the judgement that control has moved from 'the accurate transmission of appropriate

messages' to one where control is exercised through the monitoring of the consumption of such messages (Dale,1989:133). Writing in 1989, Dale would not yet have been witness to the full controlling impact of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) and he remains sanguine that initiatives such as the formation of the Assessment Performance Unit, the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) Mode 3 examinations and the Schools Council for Curriculum and Examination (SCCE) would ensure a degree of teacher autonomy – largely because of their status as bodies and initiatives 'demanded by, and controlled by, the teaching profession' (Dale, 1989:130). Notwithstanding this degree of optimism, Dale never loses sight of the correlation between the degree of autonomy afforded teachers by the state and the way in which the requirements of that state would, of themselves, be used to regulate teachers' actions. In an echo of Callaghan's comments about the legitimacy of the state's interest in education being as valid as its interest in any area of public life, Dale identifies capital accumulation as its prime purpose and points to the necessity, in its own terms, of eliminating anything that threatens this process.

At base, Dale's observations reinforce the notion of previous chapters that the liberal humanist notion of education gradually gave way to an increasingly hegemonic, or normalised, interpretation of education as the production of human capital. He locates the idea of control of teachers firmly within the framework of the necessity of the accumulation of such capital. Ball (1990) takes this notion further, contextualising the control of education in general – and teachers in particular – within a Foucauldian perspective that is captured in the expression of the idea that 'every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the knowledge and power they bring with them' (Foucault (1971) in Ball, 1990:3).

In terms of how this discipline and control manifests itself for teachers, Ball, writing in 1990, but identifying those elements of the control of teachers which would be more clearly articulated by him nearly twenty years later using the term 'survivalism' (Ball, 2008), notes a clear movement away from even the regulated autonomy perceived by Dale. A shift in the language and discourse

of education had, only some two years since the implementation of the 1988 ERA, brought about a situation where management techniques were increasingly used to control the detail of teachers' work, subjecting such detail to the 'logics of industrial production and market competition' (Ball, 1990:153).

With an enviable degree of prescience, Ball identifies developments in the control of teachers that begin to lodge decision making with managerial teams, separating policy from execution as well as enforcing quality control through appraisal schemes and cohort testing. Further to this, the first loosely formulated efforts by the state to link teacher performance to pay begin to emerge at this time. Most significantly, Ball identifies two central ideas about the control of teachers that set the tone for debate about their autonomy as the turn of the century approached. The first of these, after both Foucault and Gramsci, is the extent to which teachers had become complicit in their own discipline through being 'trapped into taking responsibility for their own 'disciplining' through schemes of self-appraisal, school improvement and institutional development' (Ball, 1990: 162). Such instances of self-regulation manifest themselves in the responses of many of the teachers in this study.

The second central idea is the way in which the prevalent political discourse of the supremacy of the market, by this time fully entrenched after eleven years of Thatcherism, had begun to influence the way in which teachers viewed themselves as autonomous professionals. Ball argues that this was contemporaneous with a gradual diminution of confidence in the way in which they were prepared to defend the pedagogical gains achieved towards the move to comprehensive education, resulting in a sacrifice of some idealism and principle in favour of 'a strongly articulated concern with efficiency, the social and economic requirements of industry, competition and national interests' (1990:164). The episode of the SATs boycott (see Chapter 1) offers something of a counterpoint to this argument, but such resistance was short-lived and unique.

The hegemonic position of this discourse was to become even more firmly entrenched, notwithstanding the election of a New Labour government some

seven years later. Ball, naturally, could not have predicted this with any confidence and even goes so far as to characterise his critical position as a potentially 'Luddite analysis', acknowledging the fact that it could be seen as out of time in a brave new world where the educational project of the moment characterised itself through using 'the language of crisis to persuade people that something needs to be done urgently and that the moment is opportune due to the breakdown of consensus' (Quicke, 1988: 5). In brief, the principles and ideals that are the engine of the liberal humanist tradition came face to face at this time with the demands of market ideology – and it was this latter ideology that was in tune with the dominant ideological and political discourse of the day.

4.4   Ofsted. Inspection not dialogue, regulation not licence.

The 1992 Education Act instituted the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and by so doing gave another clear indication that the relationship between the state and schools was changing. The apprehension, and subsequent institutional fractiousness prompted by an Ofsted inspection or its impending arrival have become part of the weave and weft of teachers' lives in England. Chapman's 2002 study uncovered distrust of the process from teachers at all levels along with an unfavourable comparison with its predecessor, Her Majesty's Inspectorate, which had been seen as a partner in a beneficial process:

> When you had HMI…you had a lot more dialogue and you could discuss strategies and the way forward. With Ofsted it is a snapshot you get the report and off they go. (Headteacher interview. Chapman, 2002: 264)

A flavour of the reaction from some in the profession is captured in Marshall's piece for *The Independent* newspaper in 2003 where she observed that:

> From its inception…. Ofsted was not seen as a neutral organisation but an institution with political clout attached to a certain ideological bent. This significantly damaged its reputation among the teaching profession

and to this day undermines any possible influence it might have. (Marshall, 2003)

Rosenthal (2004:143) 'found that there exists a small but well-determined adverse, negative effect associated with the Ofsted inspection event for the year of the inspection.' Fielding (2001:695) reached the conclusion that 'the system for inspecting schools in England carries with it an over confident and brusque carelessness born of too much power, too much questionable data and too little thought.' But perhaps most significantly for the purposes of this study are the findings of Jeffrey and Woods, whose work identified the fact that Ofsted inspection 'had a latent function of deprofessionalisation.' They argue that professional uncertainty was induced, with teachers experiencing 'confusion, anomie, anxiety and doubt about their competence' (Jeffrey and Woods, 1996:325). These authors are clear in their conclusion that such uncertainly did not arise from a lack of what we might characterise as weakness, incompetence or poor school leadership, but are insistent that such reactions have to be seen against the background of government reforms of the previous ten years. This ensemble of reforms had the cumulative effect of undermining the professional confidence and, it might be argued, the ontological certainties of teachers. Resentment towards Ofsted looms large in the remarks of the teachers at the centre of this study and is a reinforcement of the notion that this particular apparatus, with its emphasis on outcomes not process, embodies much that colours teachers' views of their autonomy. The central importance of Ofsted, subsuming and overshadowing its HMI predecessor, stands as a compelling metaphor for the way in which control, discipline and concomitant diminution of professional confidence and autonomy became the prevalent discourse in English schools as the century drew towards its close.

4.5   The 1990s: between optimism and managerialism

The normalisation of this discourse of control and hegemony was a gradual process. As a Head of English in a comprehensive school in the early 90s, charged with the introduction of the National Curriculum, I presided over team meetings where the clear consensus was that despite some peculiarities – a reading list devised with a clear eye on a notion of tradition and an ill-formed and poorly articulated view of the teaching of language skills – there was nothing here that would require an upheaval of practice. This was before the imposition of Standardised Assessment Tasks (sic), soon to become transformed to Tests and referred to ubiquitously as SATs. School league tables were yet to be published and the first Ofsted inspections had not happened. The literature of this period reflects this incremental introduction of firmer regulation.

Writing in 1995, Hoyle and John's discussion of teacher professionalism locates the notion in a symbiosis of the state, teacher autonomy and the economic conditions of the time. They remain sanguine and upbeat about the fact that 'despite increasingly falling behind in terms of monetary rewards, teachers could always point to the high level of classroom autonomy as one of the salient characteristics of the job' (Hoyle and John, 1995:39). This optimistic note continues when they argue that teachers will be able to 're-establish new forms of autonomy and control through collaborative measures at intra-school and inter-school level' (1995:43). However, the contention of this study is that developments during the subsequent fifteen years, played out against the neo-liberal policies of marketization and competition, militated against the establishment of such collaboration – especially at inter-school level – and, as the analysis of research in this study will demonstrate, contributed to a limited teacher autonomy rather than helping to establish any new forms of it. The traditional, occupational acceptance by teachers of the fact that they were entering a profession driven by motives of altruism and service along with enjoying a degree of professional autonomy - and that relatively unattractive remuneration was the reverse side of this coin

(Brookhart and Freeman, 1992) - was under threat as more means of control made an impact on their daily lives.

Significantly, in Hoyle and John's 160 page volume there is only one, brief reference to Ofsted along with continuing expressions of faith in the teaching profession to 'shape the goals of education' and to 'ensure that the goals established by the government do not greatly reduce the autonomy of the individual teacher' (1995:80). Nevertheless, it is when talking of the emergence of an increasingly managerial layer of activity in schools that Hoyle and John's comments take on a degree of great prescience. In a formulation which identifies a difference between the managerial and pedagogical – a difference that would not have been recognised in schools prior to the 1988 ERA – they note that:

> There is abundant activity in the upper (managerial) and lower (pedagogical) compartments, but the relationship between the two is unknown and may be slight. The relationship may well be changing as a result of the growth of quality assurance strategies and the school improvement movement, *but one cannot say that the relationship has been considerably tightened or that it is inherently amenable to further being tightened.* (Hoyle and John, 1995: 86 - my emphases)

Writing from a distance of some fifteen years, this thesis goes on to demonstrate that the tightening to which they refer has, indeed, taken place and that accountability and control of teachers as professionals have become subsumed and normalised to an extent that even these astute commentators could not have predicted.

Hoyle and John are not alone in the holding of such sanguine views about the ability of the profession to act autonomously – or even innovatively. Writing some three years later, David Hargreaves, even given his position as an educational advisor to New Labour and his role as former Ofsted inspector, remains adamant that 'teaching…must become a profession in which able graduates believe they can play innovative roles in the task of professional

and institutional reshaping that is required with the emergence of the knowledge society' (Hargreaves, 1998: 11). Further to this, in rhetoric redolent of the 'new' times following the election of New Labour in the previous year he talks of how 'teachers must help to shape the education system of the future rather than simply functioning within it. This is the vision of post-millennial teachers' (Hargreaves, 1998: 12).

Hargreaves does not discuss how the regime of high-stakes testing, published league tables and a raft of measures to control teachers might have already, by 1998, had an impact on such a vision of what teachers and schools could achieve. In the same year, the Teaching and Higher Education Act (Legislation, UK), to which as a member of the National Schools Standards Task Force he would have contributed, began to formalise a managerial agenda that introduced new regimes for the inspection of teacher training and the forerunner of performance management through new ways of assessing headteachers and teachers. Alongside this, the Act also enabled the establishment of the General Teaching Council to provide a further layer of scrutiny of teachers' conduct and in the same vein of the diminution of professional esteem, revived a persistent political preoccupation with identifying means of ridding schools of 'incompetent teachers' more rapidly.

In their examination of the policy documentation of the late 1990s, Bottery and Wright (2000) express severe reservations about the way in which the increasing pressure of market forces rendered Hargreaves' wish to see teachers achieve more than simply functionality within the system, something of a forlorn hope. Counterpoised to the official line of the 1998 Green Paper (DfEE, 1998:13) that 'the government has no wish to impose any single model' of how schools should meet the challenge of a new millennium, they argue that a combination of prescriptive government policy aligned to an increasingly acquiescent professional culture has the effect of promoting an approach that is 'monolithic' and which 'silences alternative voices and contributes to a form of corporatism in which genuine democracy is radically reduced' (Bottery and Wright, 2000: 475). Teachers, it could be argued, entered the new century having seen not only the licensed autonomy of their

predecessors diminished, but also with the very basis of their professional judgement sidelined to the point of irrelevance. In an echo of Simon's central question of 1981 about the lack of pedagogy in English schools (Simon, 1981) Bottery and Wright, along with Furlong et al (2000), identify the entrenched centrality of the techno-rationalist approach to teaching as being at the bottom of a situation where dissent became equated with heresy – a situation encapsulated in the critique of government legislation that proposes that 'for *anyone* to make such statements in so non-problematic a manner suggests either a radical lack of knowledge of the field or a deliberate avoidance of it' (Bottery and Wright, 2000: 480 - original emphasis). The espousal and implicit encouragement of a techno-rationalist approach is entirely consistent with a school system that was gradually becoming accustomed to the language of the market and measurable outcomes. Autonomous decision making, even at the level of classroom activity, became an inevitable victim of policy imperatives.

4.6   The new century: a new autonomy?

At the start of the new century, Quicke (2000), arguing that we live in 'new times,' reiterates his belief of 1988 that central to educational progress is a system that embraces 'demands that the freedom to experiment is taken seriously, as a guiding principle for teaching and learning' (Quicke, 1988:14) while expressing concerns that unless both individuals and institutions acknowledge the extent to which they are constrained by dominant market ideologies, there will exist a tendency for the system to replicate itself while convincing itself that it is being collaborative, sympathetic and progressive. Drawing upon the Foucauldian notion of disciplinary power, Quicke argues that the rhetoric of reform often conceals the extent to which this disciplinary power remains dominant, citing studies that have investigated the way in which the enhanced power of headteachers, operating within a competitive market system, had resulted in teachers who felt that 'they had less autonomy and less control over teaching and learning processes in their classroom' (Quicke, 2000: 395). In this, as Quicke points out, there is no surprise, given that policy driven by neo-liberalism and marketization has no regard for the

consequences of inequality or diminution of personal freedoms that may arise as a consequence of its implementation. From here, Quicke goes on to discuss a culture of compliance. He develops Ball's 1990 observation of the Foucauldian notion of self-discipline, noting the way in which the idea of collaboration with a common sense position 'can be used as (a) mechanism for co-opting teachers and securing their compliance with various reforms of a dubious nature from an educational viewpoint' (Quicke, 2000:305). In this, of course, the Gramscian notion of consent to domination is also germane to the argument. He then goes on to pose a series of questions, many of which will form something of a cornerstone around which the research of this current thesis will be built and, as such, worth quoting in full:

> Is it possible for professionals to think and act in an open and creative way in institutions in which the language of collaboration is pervasive, but where the reality is often rather different? Can they avoid becoming trapped in bureaucracies of a new kind? Can professional knowledge become a form of knowledge which genuinely prompts the enquiries of practitioners? Or will it always tend to close down more than it opens up? Can professionals avoid reductionism? (Quicke, 2000: 314)

The concern for the future articulated in Quicke's comments here is replicated in the comments of Furlong et al, writing in the same year. Looking at the work of the providers of initial teacher education in the years up to the end of the twentieth century, the authors trace a gradual, but uneven, demise of the traditions of liberal humanism in the education of teachers – with a concomitant effect in schools - towards a situation in which successive governments have been keen to establish different conceptions of professionalism where technically competent practitioners become proficient in ways that would benefit 'schools facing the demands of a changing national and global economic context' (Furlong et al, 2000: 143). The direction of travel towards a model of controlled human capital is clear here, and although the authors recognise the merits of a highly trained, techno-rationalist teaching force which is 'in its own way, highly professional' they go on to express the reservation that such a model is in their opinion 'significantly less concerned

to develop students' ability to work as autonomous professionals than in the past' (Furlong et al, 2000:144). Ultimately, although Furlong et al hold out the hope that there will be resistance from teachers against the vagaries of a market led system – which has to be the corollary of a system that chases the needs of this 'changing national and global economic context' – they still see the developments in the training of teachers as a clear reflection of the neo-liberal grip that, by the turn of the century, had come to characterise official discourses that dominated the development of schools. The identity of a market-led system, they argue, embodies the principles of neo-liberalism. They warn that this approach 'has no intrinsic properties and its form is dependent only on the exchange value determined by the market and is therefore infinitely variable and unstable' (Furlong et al, 2000: 159).

The grip of the techno-rationalist approach to the training of teachers became embodied in one particularly emblematic, cumbersome, time-consuming, bureaucratic exercise; the assembling of Standards' portfolio in which student teachers were obliged to collect concrete 'evidence' of how they had met a list of 33 pre-determined standards established by the Teaching Development Agency (TDA). A major factor in the assessment of the required qualities to gain teacher status thus became instrumentalised and atomised (Sachs, 2003b; Menter et al, 2006) and reduced to an exercise in the checking off of items on a pre-specified list. Tellingly in terms of the discussion about the sidelining of pedagogy, it is a term that is mentioned only once in this entire list of standards.

In the same year as Furlong et al voice their concerns about the prevalence of this techno-rationalism, Bottery and Wright (2000) paint a picture of a 'directed' profession; one that feels itself so beleaguered in attempting to cope with the whirlwind of intervention and legislation since 1988 that it finds itself able to do little else than to keep up with the day job. Time for genuine reflection, let alone scholarship, is subsumed by the need merely to survive, thereby reinforcing the techno-rationalist model of a profession that, almost inevitably, chooses to police itself in order to demonstrate its compliance with a dominant ideology that demands the delivery of a particular product or

outcome. This conformity is underlined when we look, very briefly, at the history of industrial unrest among teachers. Strikes over pay and conditions in the late 1970s were followed in 1985/6 by some prolonged industrial action over salaries. Thereafter, there were years of relative calm leading to 1998 when, in common with all industries, the number of days lost to strikes was the lowest in the century (Hicks and Allen, 1999: 25). By the turn of the century, any putative resistance glimpsed by Furlong certainly did not manifest itself in the form of organised action by the profession and its representatives. Indeed, Bottery and Wright seem to despair of a profession that now had its nose so firmly to the grindstone that it had, in their view, become incapable of seeing the forces that had placed it in such an undignified position. Only by looking more widely at the political and economic forces that have shaped this situation, they argue, could teachers begin to understand their own professionalism. Their view that only by teachers 'becoming more informed on the forces at work in society that are steering education' (Bottery and Wright, 2000:484) corresponds neatly with the theory behind this particular study that it is these wider forces that impact upon teachers' professional lives on a daily basis and in the most immediate of ways.

Not all commentators are so perspicacious. By 2003, Sachs begins her exploration of teacher professionalism from a position that implicitly accepts that the days of licensed autonomy are truly dead and buried, with the state being the gravedigger. Even writing from the perspective of an Australian observer in a country whose adoption of a 'centralised and mandated curriculum and the publication of students' results' (Sachs, 2003:10) has not yet reached the normalised situation of that in England, she accepts that current policy agendas place teachers in a position where the prevalent requirement for accountability entirely supersedes and subsumes discourse about autonomy. It is significant that in doing so, she chooses to cite Giddens (1998, 2000) whose formulation of a political 'Third Way' influenced so much UK policy decision making at the time. Like Bottery and Wright, Sachs sees the potential for teacher autonomy located in the profession lifting its gaze from the dreary grind, talking of teachers who need 'to emerge and gain

acceptance both inside and outside of the profession' (2003:12), involving themselves in a 'broad social movement' – the exact nature of which she does not explore - enabling them to 'open themselves up and become more publicly vulnerable and accessible' (2003:13). In a more optimistic characterisation than that of Bottery and Wright's 'directed' profession, Sachs refers to her formulation as 'transformative professionalism' – one that lives within an, as yet, undefined social movement, sustained by a notion of 'generative politics' (2003:144).

Writing in the aftermath of a period in which neo-liberal education policies had become gradually normalised and from a locale relatively untouched by the stark market forces of England – national testing, league tables, Ofsted – Sachs's tone is somewhat lighter than that of some of her UK counterparts. Nonetheless, she shares with them an analysis of the central paradoxes in terms of teacher autonomy as it exists within a marketized system, pointing to the oddity of teachers 'being exhorted to be autonomous while at the same time … under increasing surveillance by politicians and the community to be more accountable through standards regimes and rituals of verification' (2003:123). Notwithstanding her vagueness about the 'broad social movements' and 'generative politics' that will bring about the 'transformative professionalism' that she see as the way forward, Sachs, along with many of those cited above, has little doubt about the difficulty of challenging a system that she sees as unequivocally led by 'state control and market forces' (2003:135) but does, ultimately, see hope in an 'activist orientation (which) comes from educators understanding not only their practice but also themselves in relation to the society in which they live' (2003:153).

Sachs' speculation about future developments hints at a degree of sanguinity born of the possibility of these generative politics providing some form of resistance. Similarly, Wong (2006) , writing from a Chinese perspective, whilst acknowledging that the move to a marketized model is 'designed and led by the state' sees this as opportunity for 'teachers to renew their skills…to meet new requisites in education' (Wong, 2006:33). However, most contemporaneous commentators address the subject of teacher autonomy

from a UK perspective devoid of such guarded optimism. Evetts (2005), concentrating on the idea of professionalism based on trust, discretion and competence identifies a dichotomy between what she calls, in an echo of work cited earlier in this chapter (Braverman, 1974; Bailyn, 1985; Meiksins, 1985), organisational and occupational professionalism. Fundamentally, this dichotomy manifests itself in the difference between professional practices that grow from within the confines of an organisation and those that exist independently of it. Most significantly, and in a theoretical position that refines the idea that compliance is a consequence of normalisation, Evetts, drawing on the work of Fournier (1999), suggests that the use of the discourse of professionalism works to inculcate 'appropriate' work identities, conducts and practices. She considers this as 'a disciplinary logic which inscribes "autonomous" professional practice within a network of accountability and governs professional conduct at a distance' (Fournier,1999:280). This consideration leads to the central question of who it is, exactly, that sets the targets for the measurement of such professionalism, pointing out that this is 'a strong marker, indication or test that would indicate the construction of professionalism 'from above' rather than 'from within' the occupational group' (Evetts, 2005:15).

Evans (2007) takes this idea of professionalism 'from above' one stage further, talking of the way in which 'external agencies appear to have the capacity for deigning and delineating professions' (Evans, 2007:23) and of the way in which this, in its turn, is correspondent to the ideas of delivery and service agreement. She synthesises these ideas in what she characterises as a demanded or prescribed professionalism. In common with Sachs, she sees some possibility of individuals eroding the influence of such an imposed set of practices, talking of how teachers and headteachers can work round prescribed demands and expectations for the benefit of pupils. In a baffling conclusion to her analysis, however, Evans sees the way forward for teacher professionalism residing in the possibility that 'we inadvertently stumble upon a new idea' that will enable individuals to recognise an 'attitudinal development' over which these same individuals – those who she recognises

to have been subject to the control of 'change initiators' – understand that they can, indeed, 'exercise some degree of control' (Evans, 2007: 34).

The analyses of those commentators who appear to harbour a notion of teacher autonomy reviving itself, having survived the collision with the juggernaut of control and scrutiny is, in itself, paradoxical. There is a realisation that neo-liberalism and market forces represent a threat to autonomy, but an avoidance of the argument that such forces hold sway in almost every aspect of policy – both in and beyond education – and that to overcome them requires more than, somehow, asserting the value of , as yet, undefined alternatives. If, as seems the case with Sachs and Evans in particular and with Evetts to a lesser extent, the argument is that at some point 'enough will be enough' and teachers will assert their right to control and accountability, it is difficult to understand from where such optimism stems.

More recently, the analyses of commentators in the UK are pessimistic about the existence of anything approaching a truly autonomous professionalism surviving the onset of the market, managerialism and performativity. Whitty (2007) echoes Mahoney and Hextall's observation that 'in order to meet the standards, you have to be the kind of person that the standards have in mind' (Mahoney and Hextall, 2000:79) when he suggests that those who do not buy in to the 'new marketized culture of schooling' will find themselves sidelined as new teachers espouse a 'rather restricted vision of professionalism/professionality' that will 'demonstrate their potential to join the leading cadres' (Whitty, 2007:286). The upshot of this, he argues, is that those who conform will enjoy a degree of licensed autonomy, while those who cling to an 'outmoded social service version of professionalism' - the outdated liberal humanists – will find themselves restricted and regulated. In this respect, the later findings in this study – particularly those stemming from interviews with headteachers – will make exceptionally interesting reading.

Beck (2009) is just as stark about the prospects of an emergent autonomy in his conclusions. In a formulation that extends earlier definitions, he talks of a coercive professionalism that is built upon 'a selective set of borrowings from

management theory' and 'a loose form of behaviourism that underpins the unremitting emphasis on the acquisition of particular performance capabilities and associated dispositions' (Beck, 2009: 10). Storey (2009), in her investigation of the impact of what she sees as a kind of new deal between the profession and government – a deal that holds out the promise of recognition and promotion through compliance with performance management systems – talks of an earned autonomy which is 'repeatedly offered as a signal of future professional self-regulation' (Storey, 2009:125).

Furlong (2008) offers a different, but entirely connected perspective on Storey's formulation of the 'deal' struck between teachers and the government, identifying the development of a strong compulsion for the profession to adopt a 'comply or die' approach. Drawing upon the conclusions of the McKinsey report (2007) as well as his own work (2000, 2005), Furlong characterises the situation as a world in which attachments drawn from personal conviction or experience can come to be seen as almost 'pathological' as policy drivers favour a situation which could potentially produce the 'endlessly re-trainable employee as policies change and develop over time' (Furlong, 2008: 735). In an echo of Alexander (2004), Furlong talks of the 'hollowing out' of teachers' knowledge as they strive to achieve the models of 'excellence' formulated externally by managerial bodies, and which striving, in its turn, marginalises genuine debate and investigation that goes beyond the pragmatic or 'effective'. In terms of a glimpse of optimism with regard to achieving anything like a professional autonomy, Furlong, whilst acknowledging that predicting the nature of any developments remains speculative, looks to the work of Moore et al (2002) which echoes Quicke's question of 2000 about whether or not energy and enterprise will be stifled in a marketized, performance-led system. In doing so, his analysis about the prospect for autonomy looks to the way in which teachers act both pragmatically and eclectically. Talking of the findings of Moore et al he states that:

> Few teachers declared themselves as either wholesale supporters or rejecters of government reforms in education; almost all talked of the

ways in which they had modified previous practice to 'bring it in line' with current policy, or had found ways of incorporating current policy into a largely unaltered continuing practice. (Furlong, 2008:736)

On the face of it, this pragmatic compromise on the part of teachers would seem to indicate a healthy, even slightly subversive state of affairs. The argument about professional autonomy and its manifestations in the future, however, may have to go beyond a conclusion that brings comfort in the fact that behind some classroom doors, some teachers are quietly but determinedly defying the system as they go about pursuing the best interests of their students. As Moore et al point out, this ability to 'play the game' is not a new development for teachers, but what may be new is their willingness 'to adopt the terms so ubiquitously and enthusiastically' (Moore et al , 2002: 561). Such compliance they argue, as I will later in this thesis, albeit that it bears with it the feel of a degree of independence, operates within a fundamental acceptance of a set of values and actions that combine to quell genuine debate about, and interrogation of, the system within which teachers operate. Has this compliance with the demands of the current systems led to 'the de-politicisation of the teaching profession in which healthy educational debate is being replaced by an all-pervasive politics of compromise' (Furlong, 2008:736)? The interviews with teachers that follow attempt to reveal whether or not compromise and acceptance are as endemic as some of these writers suspect and draw the conclusion that, although increasingly difficult to envisage, resistance is not entirely out of the question.

4.7   From licensed to earned to managed: what the literature tells us.

This chapter began by outlining a proposal to look, in a chronological way, at the emergent views of commentators with regard to teacher autonomy. A review of the principal terms used by the commentators cited above in relation to different characterisations of teacher autonomy is revealing. The figure below attempts to capture something of the evolving discussion around professional autonomy since the 1988 ERA, identifying Braverman's fundamental principle of limited autonomy as a starting point. The

identification of certain commentators associated with particular formulations is intended to be indicative rather than comprehensive.

Figure 1. Emerging conceptions of professional autonomy

1974 Braverman	The illusion of workers' autonomy: decision making from fixed and limited choices
1985 Bailyn	The distinction between strategic and occupational autonomy.
1989 Dale	Identification of the move from licensed to regulated teacher autonomy.
1990 Ball	The introduction of controlled autonomy via the logic of industrial production and the co-option of teachers into a system of self-discipline.
1996 Jeffrey and Woods	The introduction of Ofsted and the undermining of teachers' confidence through scrutiny and regulation.
2000 Furlong et al Bottery and Wright	Directed autonomy and the primacy of measurable outcomes for schools. The diminution of scholarship and enquiry in the face of market demands.
2000 Quicke	Coercive autonomy through the normalisation of co-option and compliance
2005 Evetts	After Braverman - organisational autonomy: the inculcation of appropriate work identities. The paradox of autonomy from above.
2007 Evans	Prescribed autonomy as demands from a range of outside agencies predominate
2007 Whitty	Earned autonomy as a reward for compliance and conformity
2009 Beck Storey	The management of earned autonomy: the promise of the reward of greater freedom for current compliance.

The language traces a conceptual development starting from a theoretical position which brings into question the very possibility of autonomy for any individual or group of workers operating within an organised system not of

their own making. This is important: the premise of this study is not, as stated from the very beginning, to invoke a non-existent golden age of unfettered freedom enjoyed by schools and teachers. Nonetheless, the extent to which a range of individual and collective judgements can presently be exercised by teachers is at the centre of this study, especially when measured against the manifestations and publicly expressed priorities of current policy. Even given this starting point, the emergent language of teacher autonomy reveals that prior to the 1988 ERA, if exercised with a careful, weather-eye for the requirements from a smallish range of outside agencies - principally the requirements of examination boards - teachers enjoyed a degree of genuine autonomy largely free from outside scrutiny or interrogation. Balanced against too positive a notion of teacher autonomy in the period prior to 1988 has to be the understanding that, as Grace (1978: 97) reminds us, the nature of 'control and autonomy have always been central in the ideological struggles' and that, well into the later part of the twentieth century, 'features of control and constraint were dominant over features of autonomy' for teachers. Notwithstanding this important caveat, there is broad agreement 'that it was after 1976 that *accountability* definitely replaced *partnership* as the dominant metaphor in discussions about the distribution of power in the education system' (Chitty, 2009: 128 – his emphases). The anecdote that follows is most definitely not about golden-ageism, but the episode from my own professional experience is instructive. When one considers the continuum from licensed to managed, it captures something of the movement between these two extremes.

As a serving practitioner I was, naturally, always interested in the results obtained by my students in public examinations at 16 and 18 and, as a matter of course, would break into the summer vacation, when results were released, to visit school. There, along with colleagues, one noted with personal and professional interest the achievements, successes and failures of our students and commiserated or congratulated accordingly. One then exchanged thoughts with students and colleagues and resumed the summer vacation period, generally satisfied that justice had been done, albeit alarmed by the occasional instance of either over or under-performance. Statistics

relating to grades, subjects and cohorts were not collected; percentages were not collated; subject differentials were not calculated and, significantly, appeals against results were practically unheard of – the stuff of folklore. This licensed state of affairs pertained until the mid 1990s when the force of the market and the concomitantly enhanced profile of the consumer combined to make the August drop-in at school a far more fraught affair for all concerned. This development is perfectly captured in a *Daily Telegraph* article of July, 2008 – timed just prior to the release of annual results - which deals variously with comments from a school leader who boasts of expertise in playing the system, an acknowledgement from the examination boards that schools have become systematic and knowledgeable in terms of such appeals and then goes on to give guidance about the necessary procedures should members of the public wish to pursue this course. By the start of the century, part of my professional routine required me to factor in time that would inevitably have to be spent in dealing with the appeals that increased every year. It is interesting to note that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) publish no year-on-year data on the number of such appeals.

Of the fact that I had enjoyed a degree of licence throughout my teaching career I am entirely certain. Furthermore, the fact that I had been, in my view, fortunate enough to *start* my career in such circumstances is of enormous importance and influence. The extent to which I had been regulated, managed and coerced is, I like to believe, minimal - and the idea that I was ever complicit in diminishing my own professional autonomy is anathema. It is possible that I am overestimating the strength of my personal resistance – along with my contribution to collective resistance – and that I was just as subject to the trends identified by Freidson (1984) in being a victim of 'antitrust decisions, political pressure to exercise more control over errant members, and the administrative requirement of greater accountability in large organisations' (Freidson, 1984: 1) as any professional, even before the impact of the 1988 ERA. I like to think this is not the case and that I behaved consistently as an autonomous professional. This study goes on to investigate the extent to which contemporary teachers share any of my certainty, if at all. The literature around autonomy might seem to demonstrate that the erosion

and diminution of teacher autonomy has been an incremental and irresistible process. If this is the case and if, along with this, the profession has been compliant and self-disciplining in the process, the possibilities for an autonomous, self-directed profession seem to be limited. The study of teachers' ideas and attitudes around their professional autonomy that follows interrogates the extent to which - to return to the central metaphor of this study – the capture of their collective soul has been complete and asks why this might be important and, crucially, to whom. Implicit in any Marxist analysis is consideration of the possibilities for resistance - and the possibilities for this are bound up with the investigation into how teachers currently view themselves as autonomous workers.

4.8   Chapter summary

This chapter has completed the explication of that part of the study which traces the link between material and economic conditions – the base – and the way in which this has shaped developments in the curriculum which, in their turn, and in conjunction with the impact of this economic base, have influenced emergent notions of teacher autonomy. The chapter has considered literature around labour theory, neo-liberalism, curriculum, pedagogy and teacher autonomy. It has continued to place this latter issue firmly in the context of a wider political and economic discourse. It has considered the views of a range of academics, usually UK based, all of whom, to a lesser or greater degree, concur that a diminution of teacher autonomy is bound up with the dominant ideology of the market and neo-liberalism. This study will return to the views of some of the commentators cited here when discussing its own conclusions.

The two chapters that follow form an investigation into super-structural manifestations of this base. The first of these examines the ideological drive towards free-market policies before moving on to look in a detailed way at how such policies emerged in concrete form and, in turn, made their impact on teachers' professional autonomy.

Chapter 5

The superstructure: how intellectual forces reflect the free market.

This chapter reinforces one of the central theoretical positions of the study which is that from an economic base, super-structural manifestations of ideology and social consciousness are formulated and, in their turn, strengthen the hegemonic position of that very base. In itself, this is a reinforcement of the Marxist precept of consciousness being formed in circumstances that are not of the individual's making. The argument of this thesis is that an array of significant forces exists to diminish the possibility of teacher autonomy. This chapter argues that super-structural expressions of neo-liberal economics render the development of such autonomy even more difficult. Within the set of material conditions that evolve from the hegemony of neo-liberalism is the teacher, whose struggle to exercise any professional independence in such circumstances is examined within this study as a whole. What follows in this chapter is a demonstration of how deeply rooted is the ideological position that militates against the enactment of any such autonomy.

The chapter conducts an analysis of the writing and commentary of those close to, and involved in, policy making and argues that, although largely the preserve of right-leaning thinkers and commentators, market led policies and a neo-liberal outlook are not the unique or distinctive position of any British political party or their camp followers; adherence to these ideas often cuts across traditional and formerly entrenched political animosities. It argues that beyond – and firmly connected to – the economic discourse of neo-liberalism that prevails, distinct ideological strains run through the approach to education policy making in England since 1976. The chapter notes that some of the influential voices in policy making do not always regard themselves as ideologues but sometimes more as the champions of a notion of common sense and reason. Similarly, some choose not to consider the social and material circumstances that may impede or have an impact on policy initiatives and ideas in any way.

As a consequence of this lack of any firmly doctrinaire positioning on the part of some commentators, what follows is not the exposition of a clearly defined political and economic creed. The conclusion, however, remains firm: either wittingly or otherwise, such philosophical and ideological outlooks as are revealed all lead back to an acceptance, explicit or not, of the need for the market to drive educational provision. The subsequent chapter examines the current manifestations of this policy in some detail; this chapter looks at the intellectual provenance of these ideas. At the centre of all of this is the 'soul of the teacher' (Ball, 2003) to whom it falls to enact political measures and whose thoughts and ideas, as revealed through the collected data, are matched up to the critique and discussion of current policy in the final chapter of this study.

5.1   Neo-liberals by default

*They're radical all right. It's just that it's the radicalism of the 1950s. (*Interview with Arthur, former headteacher and government adviser on education. March, 2011. See Chapter 10)

Those charged with advising on policy or, indeed, those who go to it of their own volition, do not always necessarily think of themselves as disciples of Hayek or Friedman. They may not, in fact, even consider themselves ideologues – although, as we shall see in some of the following paragraphs, some assume such a mantle with a glad and enthusiastic heart. All, to paraphrase the Shavian epigram, consider themselves to be good men (as they almost exclusively are) who mean well. Some are happy to formulate philosophy and outlooks that deliberately ignore the social and material conditions that could determine the validity of their proposals. Few, in short, are political economists. Ball (1998) captures this variegation of outlook when observing that:

National policy making is inevitably a process of bricolage…ramshackle, compromise, hit-and-miss affairs that are reworked, tinkered with,

nuanced and inflected through complex processes of influence, text production, dissemination and, ultimately, recreation in contexts of practice. (44)

Since Callaghan's Ruskin speech, through the ERA and up to the policy changes discussed in the following chapters, it is the broad claim of most of those who have had the ear of successive governments that they are encumbered by nothing other than the need to promote sound common sense and a duty to make schools work for the benefit of the majority. This apparent ideological neutrality is encapsulated in the espousal of two central ideas, both discussed in previous chapters: a promotion of 'what works' informed, in turn, by the notion of 'best practice.'

This fundamental pragmatism is exemplified most clearly in the role played in the last two decades by Michael Barber. Having been central to New Labour's education planning and reforms and receiving the acknowledgement of a knighthood for his services, the coalition government was quick to express its admiration for his contribution and, it is believed, offered him a similar advisory post in the new administration (*Guardian*, 2011). Similar admiration was extended by the coalition to another of New Labour's senior advisors, Andrew – later Lord – Adonis (Parliament, 2010a). Underpinning Barber's concept of what schools should do is the essential importance of delivery – an idea developed to become the notion of deliverology and expanded upon at length in his most recent publication (Barber et al, 2011). Espousing and promoting what he characterises as the language of implementation, deliverology succeeds where policy fails. Cutting across any traditional political affiliation – albeit implicitly accepting the predominance of a human capital model of education – deliverology appears to be the ultimate manifestation of instrumentalisation, with a notion of improved service being the key driver towards the promulgation of identifiable results. At base, the argument here is that if sharp and efficient systems are deployed, this pre-empts the need for the inconvenience of any agonising dialogue over content. Indeed, it could be argued that the more reductive, narrow and prescribed these potential desired outcomes are, the easier it becomes to deliver them.

I would argue that such pragmatic instrumentalism is, of itself, a reflection of dominant super-structural discourse. Such discourse has as some of its main precepts the extolling of the virtues of an uncontested common sense along with a deep-seated mistrust of self-interested, oppositional professionals. With this goes a ubiquitous, albeit hazily formed, anxiety about over-centralisation – the U.S *bete noire* of big government. As we shall see in subsequent parts of this chapter, it seems that the right in particular is almost comfortable about constructing a narrative of apocalypticism: we are apparently bedevilled by the fecklessness of wasteful officials, hamstrung by faceless bureaucrats, dictated to by unelected quangos, cowed by political correctness and haunted by unruly and ill-bred children. Who better to deliver us from these accumulated evils than the experts in deliverology itself? If controlled systems, structures and frameworks can produce results that demonstrate progress and achievement, then what need tortured and prolonged debate about the appropriateness of the curriculum – especially when common sense dictates the obviousness of this?

It is worth a moment's reflection here to consider two points central to this study. First, the reductive nature of such discourse is writ large in the current policy decision to give priority to the narrow range of subjects in the English Baccalaureate – the measure that will be used as the quality tag for English secondary schools (Department for Education (DfE), 2010f).That these particular subjects reflect the traditionalism of the post second world war grammar schools – Arthur's radicalism of the 50s – is clear and obvious. Second, notwithstanding the unfamiliarity of the term, respondents in this study acknowledge that they enact deliverology as they go about their daily business, subjugating personal and professional judgement to the requirements of the generation of data and outcomes, the purpose of which is to demonstrate success in terms of this concept of delivery.

The durability of Barber is telling. Although not specifically articulated as advocacy of the free-market, the central importance of the concept of delivery can only be sustained within a framework where the state privileges such an

outlook. Only through the apparatus and implementation of the ERA and subsequent legislation, formulated by one particular political party, but basically unchallenged by any of its successors, can the supremacy of the drive towards outcomes remain prevalent. Whether or not commentators and advisors see themselves as ideologues, neo-liberal ideology remains the motor of their actions.

5.2   The New Right and its legacy

Consistent with the argument that, notwithstanding its firm base in the thinking of political economists, neo-liberalism underpins the philosophy - if not the public advocacy - of many close to the formulation of policy, is the emergence from the mid 1970s of the tendency labelled by many as the New Right in education (Quicke, 1988; Whitty, 1989; Green, 1991; Johnson; 1991). The formation of this movement is characterised by Johnson (1991:31) as an 'awkward and uneven drama' in which the principal actors are pragmatists rather than zealots, keen to inhabit ideological ground left vulnerable by, as they saw it, an abandonment of traditional and proven principles in favour of a muddled, misguided, socialistic set of policies. The narrative created by the New Right played well with parts of the popular imagination. Enhanced by some gleeful contributions from the popular press, schools and teachers were frequently portrayed as having abandoned Shakespeare for soap operas, Beethoven for reggae and religious education for vague and unfocused discussion of multi-culturalism and anti-sexism (Cox, 1995). One of the central figures in New Right thinking was London headteacher Rhodes Boyson who articulated what Johnson describes as an a nostalgic hankering for the 'strong dependable grammar school…complete with mental and moral disciplines, blazers, badges (and) corporal punishment' (Johnson, 1991:39) in his assertion that:

> We shall not improve the quality of education in this country until we return to a sense of purpose, continuity and authority in our general attitude to life and society.' (Boyson, 1975:137)

Boyson along with others had been instrumental in the writing of the Black Papers between 1969 and 1971 (Cox and Dyson, 1971). The Papers expressed opposition to teacher-led examinations and the growth of comprehensive schools as well as voicing concern about unfettered freedom in junior schools and issuing a concern that the move to comprehensive schools set the nation on the road to a Soviet Russian system that was already a proven failure (Szamuely, 121-138, in Cox and Dyson, 1971). They advocated the extension of schemes to allow access to independent schools (the Assisted Places Scheme) and bemoaned the growth and range of polytechnics whilst advocating the establishment of more private universities such as that at Buckingham (Salter and Tapper, 1985; Johnson, 1991). In acting and writing as they did, Boyson et al, joined by a range of individuals with close connections to the Conservative party – Ralph (later Lord) Harris, Caroline (Baroness) Cox and Max Bellof, principal at Buckingham (Johnson, 1991) – acted as the 'organising intellectuals of neo-liberalism' (Johnson, 1991:37) although, most significantly, not as yet as a recognised, co-ordinated body with any title, nomenclature or distinct political brief other then their own various convictions. As a movement, the New Right was a loose coalescence of individuals, ranging from those who were, indeed, unequivocally espousing neo-liberalism to those who were informed by traditionalism and, quite frequently, by the spectre of a Marxist 'educational establishment' leading a wild-eyed army of socialist teachers which was only ever a feature of their own collective imagination (Cox, 1995). The subsequent establishment and centrality of such bodies as the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) and the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) provided more coherent, recognised platforms for the promotion of ideology as will be illustrated in some of the discussion that follows.

5.3   The inescapable paradox of neo-liberal thinking

The New Right, whether avowed neo-liberals or not, could not escape the central paradox that bedevils all right (and occasional left) thinking about schools and education: how to avoid moves to centralisation when those very moves are crucial for the operation of a free market? Whether this is

expressed through the Secretary of State in 2011 extolling the virtues of freedom while imposing one particular method of teaching reading, or through imposing the state-controlled mechanism of producing test results through which a system of market choices is open to parents, the role of the centralised state is unavoidable. In their raillery against left-wing political domination of the education establishment, Boyson, Joseph and the New Right looked to the open market of parental preference to ensure that common sense would prevail and in doing so espouse and promote their own preferred doctrine. Unsurprisingly, there is no recognition on their part of any irony in their privileging of one political outlook over another. The basic problem for them is how, in short, can centralisation be denied when attempting to impose measures that are dependent on some sort of enforcement from a centralising body? Imbued as they were by a variety of motives and ideologies, the New Right, like its successors in the IEA and CPS, may have had to acknowledge, explicitly or otherwise, 'that reform, even on neo-liberal lines, required decisive central control' (Johnson, 1991:59).

The establishment of the National Curriculum is an interesting factor in this discussion. Despite its importance as part of regulatory machinery designed to quell the excesses of the education establishment, its creation exposes this split in the thinking of the right. The National Curriculum was designed by those characterised by Cox (1995) – himself part of the process – as 'a small right-wing pressure group' (1995:23) who, despite their commitment, passion and, as he saw it, their honesty, behaved in a 'high-handed and secretive way' (1995:25) informed by a mixture of nostalgia and a longing for a return to a golden age. Their actions were notable for an unapologetic disregard for the views of professionals and for the cooption of like minds – sometimes on the golf course – to working groups and committees (1995:22). However, for all of this assertion of bluff common sense and the sidelining of vested interests – or, one is bound to observe, *one set of* vested interests – the formation of a National Curriculum per se, even without those other elements of the ERA that liberated market forces in schools, is a centralising act. For some

outspoken neo-liberals at the time this element of centralisation was an unacceptable accommodation of regulation:

> Attempts by government and parliament to impose a curriculum, no matter how 'generally agreed' they think it to be, are a poor second best in terms of quality, flexibility and responsiveness to needs than allowing the market to decide and setting the system free to respond to the overwhelming demand for higher standards. (Haviland, 1988:28)

This unwillingness to tolerate the degree of state control inherent in the implementation of the National Curriculum, in itself a perennial area of controversy for the right, resurfaces in the discourse of the IEA and CPS in the first few years of the new century and into the election of the coalition government. Discussion of this follows in the next section.

5.4 The Centre for Policy Studies: influential voices for willing listeners.

The Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) was established in 1974 by Keith Joseph with an intention to:

> convert the Tory Party to economic liberalism. Margaret Thatcher joined the Centre as Deputy Chairman. Alfred Sherman, another key figure at the time, described the purpose of the CPS as being to 'question the unquestioned, think the unthinkable, blaze new trails.' (CPS)

As a sounding board for ideas and the promotion of 'unthinkable' ideas its influence within the Conservative party has been, and remains, significant. That the fundamental free-market doctrine which informs its thinking cuts across party affiliations is evidenced by the fact that the policies advocated by Barber, Adonis and to some extent, Giddens (see Chapter 4) and then by successive New Labour administrations have reinforced rather than challenged such precepts. Even allowing for a degree of flamboyancy in the floating of ideas whose purpose may be to shock and, in so doing, open up a

dialectic, the preoccupations and public statements of the CPS seem to be designed specifically to jar the nerves of the education establishment that it sees as being so self-interested and resistant to sensible change. A quarter of a century after its inception, the future Secretary of State for Education enthusiastically endorses the role of organisation 'at the heart of the political debate' (Gove, 2009), specifically identifying the centrality of the thinking of Joseph, Thatcher and Sherman.

Put most simply, the CPS doubts that it is the place of the state to pay in full for universal education. One of the earliest debates to exercise its members was the proposal to establish a voucher system for education, allowing parental choice and the freedom to spend such vouchers as seen fit by the consumer. This idea – an unapologetic expression of the supremacy of market forces – continues to underpin much of the philosophy of the right, with Anthony Seldon, writing in 2010, acknowledging his mother's dedication to the promotion of the scheme some 35 years earlier. In doing so, the New Right and the CPS hoped to enact one of the central tenets of Hayek's ideology, captured in his belief that it is 'possible to leave the organisation and management of education entirely to private efforts, with the government providing merely the basic finance and ensuring a minimum standard for all schools where the voucher would be spent' (Hayek, 1960: 381). This raw proposal, associated in the early 1970s most closely with Keith Joseph, has never come to fruition in the sense of the consumer sizing up options before the handing over of a voucher, however notional, to a range of competing providers. In principle, however, the central idea that 'in schooling, the parents and child are the consumers, the teacher and school administration the producers' (Friedman and Friedman, 1980:191) is axiomatic to the thinking of the CPS and its followers. Along with this essential consumerism goes a continuing challenge to the role of the state.

Seldon (2010) aptly captures the essence of this discourse. In a somewhat ironic correspondence of views between left and right, he, like the respondents in this study, acknowledges the stultifying effect of the National Curriculum on both children and teachers, talking of 'production line' schooling

and 'top-down instructions (from) government' (2010:20). In an echo of the values and ideas in the White Paper – and, indeed, in comments that would have resonance with all teachers – he advocates the promotion of good behaviour and the encouragement of responsibility and service from pupils. In an observation that might elicit measured appreciation from this study's respondents (see Chapters 8-10), he expresses the belief that Ofsted should concentrate solely on teaching and learning and goes on to reiterate the right's article of faith of the need to eradicate useless, bureaucratic quangos. In this, along with the oft-repeated yet imprecise advocacy of traditional values, there is little that is remarkable coming from an ideologically informed headteacher of a major independent school who has published works calling for closer working between the private and public sector in education (Seldon, 2001; 2002).

However, there is no evading the central paradox. Seldon recognises, like many around the New Right and the CPS, that the 1988 ERA is a 'curious mixture of free market principles and centrist prescription' (2010:19). This uncertain mixture is reflected in his own thinking. While denigrating 'simplistic league tables' (2010:13) which take no account of the 'quality of the intake' – in itself a tellingly utilitarian turn of phrase when describing children – he sees the alternative not as the scrapping of this device but rather as the construction of tables that will 'reveal information which is genuinely useful for parents and others to make discriminating judgements' (2010:13). This potential reform of league tables, in itself a central part of the coalition government's early announcements (see Chapter 8), is flawed in two respects. First, tables based on a wider range of indicators must, by their very nature, demand the collection of even more complex and varied sets of data than their predecessors. How this matches a commitment to the diminution of bureaucracy is questionable. Second, and in an observation worthy of an entirely different study, the judgments to be made by discriminating parents presuppose existing market choices which do not, in reality exist for many parents, particularly in certain parts of England (Whitty,1997; Ball and Vincent, 1998; Parsons et al, 2000). The counter argument from the right would run that academies and free schools would supply such market variety in time,

although unlike the contemporaneous legislation, Seldon's document does not forefront this structural development with any great energy. The need for the sort of data that allows choice to be made, for all of Seldon's appreciation of how this has resulted in 'stultifying' systems, remains paramount: the dichotomy between centralisation and autonomy remains unresolved.

If Seldon's observations are leavened by some apparent vestiges of a liberal humanist vision of the eradication of production line schooling, the voice of Tom Burkard is somewhat more strident in its acclamation of neo-liberal values, reinforcing the view of education as the producer of human capital. Burkard's political and ideological commentary assumes importance because a good deal of it finds its way into much of the influential government White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (Department for Education (DfE), 2010f). Along with his co-authors (Burkard, 2008; Burkard and Talbot Rice, 2008; Burkard and Meyland-Smith, 2010) Burkard presents a suite of arguments that identify the principal problems with current provision as being bound up with poor value for taxpayers' money and the directionless actions of ill-informed professionals - all of which are apparently validated by burgeoning and useless quangos. The solution to this state of affairs is the confident reassertion of traditional values and opening up the running of the system to private providers and charitable organisations. Some specific features of his proposals are worth looking at in a degree of detail.

Burkard's 2008 policy document advocating 'troops to teachers' epitomises much of the overall tone and content of what he proposes. Ex-servicemen, we are told, are 'sure of their own moral authority' and 'not intimidated by adrenaline-fuelled adolescents' (2008:13). As a school teacher across four decades, I might have to observe that, regrettably, surges of adrenaline presented far fewer problems than displays of lethargic indifference. Burkard's assumption, however, is that 'unlike most teachers they have been there before'(2008:13), leaving one to ponder what correspondence any informed observer might draw between facing the perils of modern battle and a truculent and disengaged class of Year 10 students. In what could be perceived as a perverse sideswipe at leftist ideology, Burkard suggests that if

diversity is something to be encouraged 'it would make more sense to encourage motivated servicemen and veterans to attend university than it does to dragoon recalcitrant teenagers into student life' (2008:19). In other publications the intervention of boxing clubs and Christian charities, alongside the private provision of facilities for children excluded from school, are posited as potential problem solvers (Burkard and Talbot Rice, 2008). Schools, we are informed, suffer from an increase in assaults on teaching staff, although the source of this information is confined to newspaper reports and a perplexing reference to a body called the DfE in 2008 – some two years prior to its inception (Burkard and Meyland-Smith, 2010). Personalised and child-centred learning are dismissed as the confused egalitarianism of misguided teachers and even Ofsted, the body so despised by the teachers in this study, suffers from the taint of 'the intentions and prejudices of the political classes of the time' which, given the date of this publication would indicate that Burkard is referring to New Labour (Burkard and Talbot Rice, 2008).

The narrative underpinning this cataclysmic view of state provision is pursued with boldness and vigour and, it is worth reiterating, cannot be dismissed as knockabout rhetoric: much of what is written has either informed policy or has resonance within it. Burkard proposes the abolition of practically all bodies associated with the training of teachers and headteachers; suggests that support mechanisms such as *Teachers' TV* and the General Teaching Council should be done away with (as, indeed, happened with the publication of the White Paper); advises that testing at 6+, 8+ and 11+ should be carried out through machine-scored tests – a cheaper alternative that would alleviate the burden on teachers – and, in a move that reveals the free-market ideology that drives these measures, recommends that the body that determines the level of schoolteachers' pay should also be abolished. The Free Schools initiative (see following chapter) is welcomed as the principal mechanism that will allow this free market to flourish.

5.5 The Institute for Economic Affairs: unapologetic about market forces

Contributors to the IEA's publications about education endorse the contempt for the nature and quality of state provision evinced in the work of their CPS counterparts. The need for private provision enjoys an unchallenged hegemonic position. If the work of the CPS is more about practice than research based scholarship, the IEA presents something of an attempt to adopt a more learned approach – albeit that this, too, is not entirely free from occasional populist bombast. Even allowing for the colourfulness consistent with a live speech, O'Keeffe's assertions (2002) that England faces twin threats from *The Guardian* newspaper and militant Islam because 'the latter wants to demolish our buildings and the former wants to demolish some of our key institutions' (2002:11) seem to speak more of bar room bluster than measured argument. Assertions that the Department for Education and Skills – the state education department at the time – is 'notoriously socialistic' and that teacher education is bogged down with the 'claptrap about race and so-called 'gender' and Anglocentric culture' instead of a concentration on 'litter and graffiti and bad manners and how to change them' (2002:18) are further instances of this apparently populist approach. The apocalyptic narrative that seems to be characteristic of much right-wing thinking reaches something of an apogee in O'Keeffe's conclusion, worth quoting in full and, perhaps, reminding ourselves that these are the thoughts of a research professor in education:

> A dark view of the world now also informs much of the school and university curriculum. Indeed it is not too much to say that much of the conduct of education is now steeped in despair. A child can be terrified by environmentalism when he or she is at the primary stage and taught to disdain high culture and our political history as an adolescent, before moving to a degree course infused with the deadly pessimism of political correctness.(2002:22)

O'Keeffe also shares with other commentators on the right a deep suspicion of the centralising nature of the National Curriculum, expressing wonder that Thatcher, or anyone 'who had read Hayek' could have countenanced a measure that was 'so strange and alien to British ways, that it is a wonder that Lenin did not sit up in his coffin and grin at its introduction' (2002:16).

Nonetheless, there is a political and economic analysis that goes beyond such lively eloquence and is informed by an unequivocal acceptance of neo-liberal values. Writing prior to the 2008 crash, O'Keeffe's argument rests on a well rehearsed premise. As capitalism flourishes, old divisions between classes diminish and become irrelevant. A growing and affluent middle class becomes the social norm. This sanguine view of unobstructed development and progress is enhanced through the protection of property rights and the availability of such property on a free and open market. Against a background so conducive to free exchange and consumer choice, modern markets can flourish unencumbered by the 'terrible problem of a hostile and sullen majority' (2002:5). The falsity of this analysis had not yet been exposed by the sub-prime crisis in the US, the collapse of major banking houses or the de facto collapse of hitherto relatively stable national economies – all of which increase the possibilities of a growth in such sullenness and hostility. In 2002, however, such an analysis remained tenable. For O'Keeffe and the IEA the problem for education lies with an overbearing state that has subjugated the rights of the parent and the child – Friedman's consumers – as well as (and here we witness the conjunction of ideology and economics) foisting upon this consumer false goals or products. For the IEA and the CPS this falsity exists in a system which, they concede, wants standards to rise but also wants 'other things, like the pursuit of equality and the happiness of children' (2002:6). Such a pursuit, according to this line of argument, presupposes an inability to construct curricula that are able to combine intellectual demand and rigour with these other, essentially socially based, outcomes. The solution is to construct a situation where 'those who wish to make profits by providing their clientele with the education they want for their children' (2002:7) are allowed to do so. Along with a conviction that 'privately financed education would produce intellectual improvements across the board' (2002:7) goes an

acceptance of the fact that 'we do not know what curriculum, what teaching, what examination modes, what kind of discipline the public favour till we let them demonstrate these wants via their money demands' (2002:17).

The willingness to embrace market forces is amplified in the comments of IEA Advisory Council member James Tooley, an academic who, like Barber, has enjoyed audience across the political divide. For Tooley (2000) the educational world should abandon its coyness about profit, recognising that 'whenever a school buys a pencil or a computer or pays for window cleaning' (2000:196) someone, somewhere is making money. He allows himself to contemplate whether or not 'we could start to love profit in education' (2000:196) and, like O'Keeffe, envisages the use of the private free market to ensure sound and equitable provision. Above all, Tooley's plea is for government to get 'out of the way of education' (2000:204), accusing it of unnecessary interference that predates the ERA of 1988, locating such unwanted intervention as far back as the 1870 Forster Act. This faith in the ability of the market to deliver, is captured in Tooleys' comment that 'the private alternative can blossom' as long as 'it is given the freedom to do so' and that the 'effort and space- for the family, for entrepreneurs and for philanthropy' (2000:205) must take precedence over heavy handed government intervention.

5.6   Beyond the think tanks: other voices in the public ear.

When writing of what he sees as the systematic denigration of education professionals by the media in the late 1980s, Cox observes that such vilification, when consistently repeated, can 'create beliefs which facts and arguments in quality newspapers can do little to dispel and which, crucially, influence government policy' (Cox, 1995:41). Beyond those with direct political interest through the CPS and the IEA, along with others in the Social Market Foundation or the Adam Smith Institute, exists a different set of contributors to the super-structural intellectual climate through its contribution to popular press and other media. If sections of the New Right were the organising intellectuals of neo-liberalism (Johnson, 1991) then a constituency of public

figures unafraid to court popular attention through their actions and comments were, if not its cheerleaders, then, at least, its vociferous supporters and advocates.

The narrative of the right constructed by some of the individuals whose contributions will be referred to below is characterised by the promotion of a collection of central precepts. Among these is mistrust of the self-interested professional and of the out-of-touch, left-wing trade unions that represent teachers collectively. Centralisation and state control need to be diminished and useless quangos abolished; the agendas set by unwelcome notions of health and safety and equal opportunities are deemed unreliable and, where possible, to be set up as targets for ridicule. 'New' subjects such as media studies and citizenship should have no place in a sound, subject-based curriculum and, in short, the academic rigour of a hazily recalled golden age should be reinstated. Discipline should be exerted firmly and sharply and the woolly-minded liberality of well meaning but ineffective school teachers must be replaced with a muscular certainty that is an obvious reflection of what children and parents want. These values are to be underwritten by value for taxpayers' money to be judged by transparent and reliable outcomes.

Of those individuals who featured in the public imagination in terms of promoting this discourse, whether through their own deliberate efforts or not, the most prominent was Chris Woodhead. A teacher for five years, which it later emerged may have been touched by scandal (*The Guardian*, 1999), Woodhead rose to become the first head of Ofsted in 1994 and, like Barber and others, found favour across the political divide when he retained this post with the election of New Labour in 1997. The retention of Woodhead found little favour with teachers angered by his claim in the *Daily Mail* in 1994 that there were some 15,000 incompetent teachers under the lurid headline of 'Sack the incompetent teachers' (*The Economist*, 2009). As the cited article, along with any internet search for Woodhead's name, will reveal, his writings and comments have excited interest for two decades and have, no doubt, been welcomed by news editors keen for controversial utterance. As a regular news columnist himself and a frequent guest on TV and radio shows, his has

been a clear voice expressing opinions on a range of matters from genetic determination through the need for traditional teaching methods to the absurdity of providing schooling for some over the age of 15 (*The Times*). In a damning review of one of Woodhead's (2002) publications, (*Independent*, 2002) it is referred to as a work 'that belongs to the history of publicity, not of education thought.' In public discourse, however much weight such reservations may carry in some quarters, Woodhead's has been a voice that has had both volume and some obvious resonance with policy makers.

If Woodhead is, perhaps, the most prominent and publicly recognisable of those in the forefront of promoting a version of incontestable common sense, an influential set of journalists and commentators also enjoy both publicity and recognition for their work. Writing with apparent despair about the loss of all reason in those who organise and take responsibly for state schooling, such contributors to public discourse paint a picture of schools where gay history is foisted on shocked children and parents; the promotion of notions of equality takes priority over learning; something called basic knowledge is ignored and sex education is taught in a moral vacuum (Littlejohn, 2009; Hitchens, 2010; Phillips, 2010; Paton, 2011). In such comments the concerns of Boyson (1975 above) have a clear and topical echo on the right. In an interesting appropriation of an agenda not always associated with the right, one of its most prominent popular/ist figureheads at the time of writing, is energetically taking advantage of legislation open a Free School which, as he explains it, will take a step towards the eradication of class privilege that has worked to the detriment of working-class children for decades (Young, 2010). This will happen, according to Young, through the 'resurrection of a pedagogic philosophy that has been all but discredited.' That Young's view of the suite of subjects identified as the components of this pedagogic philosophy are the same as those included in the English Baccalaureate proposed in the White Paper, with the inclusion of Latin as a compulsory subject, is worthy of note.

5.7   Conclusion: elements that influence policy.

This chapter began by identifying something of a postmodern notion that the formulation of policy could potentially be characterised as a random process, generated more through the elision and conflation of multifarious influences than on the pursuance of a grand narrative. That the New Right was scarcely a movement which identified itself as such may seem to support this. That, for example, the centralising aspect of the introduction of the National Curriculum both created unease and division among right thinkers demonstrates that there was no party-line to be pursued about the 1988 ERA. That figures once part of left-leaning organisations – Barber was at one point an officer for the National Union of Teachers and Tooley acknowledges the influence of that organisation in his own thinking – were happily employed by their previous opponents is telling. That political parties appear to have had little compunction about seeking expertise irrespective of prior political affiliation is a clear reflection of the espousal of Barber's theory of deliverology across the political spectrum. Of the fact that Seldon and O'Keeffe see themselves as political beings informed by Friedman and Hayek there is little doubt. Boyson and Burkard, on the other hand, seem to have assumed the mantle of nothing more or less than the mouthpiece of the experienced and sensible *homo rationis*. On the surface, there may seem to be little to bind together these disparate elements into any sort of ideologically informed intellectual position. Such a potentially superficial analysis requires comment.

I argue here that, at base – a term used here in the sense of its relationship to superstructure – the views expressed by those above, many of which have been articulated in the policy identified in the previous chapter, all stem from the unequivocal acceptance of the need for the market to take precedence. In his sanguine panegyric to the force of the market, O'Keeffe (2002) captures the potential for growth and development when we accept its values:

> The capitalist and the worker are not enemies but allies. The working-class shrinks, the numbers of very wealthy people increase and above all the middle class increases in size, until it becomes, in the late

twentieth century, the social norm. These changes express perfectly the sociological significance of human capital formation, a very large accumulation of human capital effectively signalling a middle class society (2002:4).

Once one has allowed for their composition prior to 2008 (or even the fact that I am writing this at a time of unprecedented and continuing global economic uncertainty) we have to accept that these comments express untroubled confidence in a system that will flourish and deliver as long as it is permitted to do so. Once the economic theory of the centrality of market forces has become sutured into the fabric of education policy making – and, indeed, all social policy making as well – it becomes bolstered and validated through the range of super-structural influences identified above. However, once such certainties are removed, arguments that rest on a projection of continued prosperity and economic development look increasingly less credible. The possibilities of organised resistance in the light of the fragility of the capitalist system, one of the most central features of Marxist theory, is examined in the final chapter of this study.

5.8   Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the nature and the range of super-structural forces that work together, stemming from the economic base, and which combine to diminish the opportunities for teachers to exercise professional autonomy in a system whose very ontological base is inimical to the promotion of such freedom. From here, and immediately prior to the sections of the study that begin to examine the experience of teachers themselves, the following chapter looks at the detailed enactment of this ideology in the form of current policy developments.

Chapter 6

Education policy in England, 2010 - 2012: value for money delivered by a range of providers.

Having now reviewed the general ideological provenance of the formation of policy, this chapter addresses the detail of current policy and practice through a consideration of the principal aspects of the policy ensemble of the coalition government as it was formulated from May, 2010 through to the early summer of 2011. As a consequence, the central question of the thesis, which is an exploration of the extent to which teachers could enjoy any degree of professional autonomy – discussed in Chapter 4 and examined in the subsequent interviews - is placed within the immediate and concrete circumstances of the enactment of neo-liberal policy.

6.1 Policy in England: 2010-2011

The chapter will look at five central elements of the education policy in England formulated by the coalition government from May 2010 to July, 2011. These are:

1. The Academies Act, 2010 (Academies Act, 2010)
2. The Schools' White Paper: *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010f)
3. *Teachers' Standards: effective from September, 2012* (DfE, 2011b)
4. *Training our next generation of outstanding teachers* (DfE, 2011a)
5. The Higher Education White Paper: *Students at the Heart of the System* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011)

6.1.1 The Academies Act

The implementation of the Academies Bill, later to obtain the status of an Act, was one of the first actions of the coalition government in May, 2010. First debated in the Commons on 27th May, 2010, it became law on 29th July, some 39 working days later. By way of illustrative contrast, the Terrorism Prevention

and Investigation Measures Bill was first read in the Commons on 23rd May, 2011 and did not achieve Royal Assent until 14th December, more than six months later. Unlike the Academies Bill, this latter piece of legislation was not deemed sufficiently urgent to ensure completion before the UK parliament's summer recess.

The Academies Act consists of 20 provisions with numerous sub-divisions in each, along with two subsequent Schedules dealing with the technicalities of implementation. Curricular provision is mentioned only once (Academies Act, 2010: 2) and in the most general of terms, referring only to the requirement of an academy to provide a curriculum that is balanced and broadly based. Teachers are not mentioned and there are only three references to headteachers, all of which are in terms of the requirement for future 'proprietors' of schools to inform the Secretary of State of particular developments. Beyond this, the Act concerns itself almost exclusively with the establishment of an apparatus that enables academies to act as independent financial entities. Among these, four sections deal in turn with aspects of centralised financing; the transfer of surplus funding from local authorities; arrangements for property transfer and, beyond these, the remaining sections concern themselves with technical implementations and arrangements. Significantly, among these technicalities is the automatic granting of charitable status – 'a qualifying Academy proprietor is a charity' (2010:7) – thereby replicating the advantages in terms of taxation benefits enjoyed by independent schools in England.

Consideration of the Academies Act is relevant in two immediate ways. First, the speed with which it passed through the legislative procedure is a clear indication of the priority afforded it by the coalition government. The reason for this urgency is bound up with the second. The Act does not concern itself directly with curriculum, teachers or students; it is about creating the circumstances in which those charged with the running and organisation of schools are afforded greater freedom and responsibility to do so at a *managerial* level. Notwithstanding a degree of irony in the fact that such freedom is granted at the behest of a centrally situated Secretary of Sate –

whose powers and responsibilities are referred to on 51 occasions in the Act – the legislation concerns itself with the stripping away of any fiscal and organisational responsibility from local authorities. Mentioned on 27 occasions in the Act, ten of the provisions for local authorities deal with the transfer of land away from these bodies, six with the need to transfer funds to proprietors and three to other instances of the ceding of powers. As an aside to these observations, the Act requires that consultation around conversion need only take place with such persons as are deemed appropriate in contrast to the requirements placed on a local authority within democratic structures that govern the actions of other community schools. However, if the Act is instrumental mainly in terms of putting in place the apparatus for *organisational* freedom and autonomy, it is in the subsequent legislation of the schools' White Paper that the argument about teacher autonomy within current curricula becomes more germane.

6.1.2 The Schools' White Paper: *The Importance of Teaching*

The White Paper of 2010 (DfE, 2010f) exemplifies the paradox identified by those several interview respondents who go on in later chapters to express frustration about the rhetoric of autonomy coupled with the language of coercion. As David, the leader of a headteachers' organisation, observes:

> He (Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education) said frequently, I'm not going to tell people what to teach, but he is telling them what to teach, and if you tell people that everybody's got to read a particular book by Jane Austen or whatever, then you are completely constraining what the teacher is doing, and that will tell them how to teach, you know, so actually people don't believe that there's real autonomy.

Beyond the identification of this paradox, this particular piece of legislation appears to present an uneasy conflation of the concepts of teacher *autonomy* and teacher *authority*, placing early emphasis on the restoration of an idea of teacher authority through the exercise of firm classroom discipline, which, to this particular practitioner of long-standing, seems to be based on convenient

mythology rather than empirical evidence. This policy emphasis on authority and discipline is something that will be looked at in greater detail later in this chapter. What the White Paper definitely does appears to do is to locate educational provision as a function of economic growth while simultaneously promoting the academies programme through a discourse dominated by this preferred structural framework.

Two separate forewords are provided to the White Paper, the first signed by the Prime Minister and his coalition government deputy and the second by the Secretary of State for Education; both make illuminating reading in terms of identifying the thrust of this legislative programme. Parts of the opening paragraph from the Prime Minister are worth citing at some length:

> What really matters is how we're doing compared with our international competitors. That is what will define our economic growth and our country's future. The truth is, at the moment we are standing still while others race past. In the most recent OECD PISA survey in 2006 we fell from 4th in the world in the 2000 survey to 14th in science, 7th to 17th in literacy, and 8th to 24th in mathematics. The only way we can catch up, and have the world-class schools our children deserve, is by learning the lessons of other countries' success. (DfE, 2010f:3)

One of those successful countries identified is Singapore, widely - and usually uncritically - recognised and cited by western governments as a model to which to aspire (Nussbaum, 2010) and one that is entirely unequivocal and unapologetic in its espousal of valuing education solely as a producer of human capital (Ka-ho Mok, 2003). The success of such nations is identified as being inextricably bound up with the quality of the teaching force – and at this point the forewords, when they begin to address the role of the teacher, along with the Executive Summary and the main text that follow, become entangled and uncertain in their purpose.

In a somewhat peculiar expression, the document talks of 'teaching standards (that) have *increased*' (DfE, 2010f:3 – my emphases) before expressing the

need to enhance the status of teaching as a profession. From here, it talks immediately about strengthening the disciplinary powers of teachers which will be underpinned by a greater school autonomy that, in itself, will be the result of freedoms enjoyed under the academies programme. Comments acknowledge the need to 'devolve as much power as possible to the front line' (2010f:3) and make an apparently seamless connection between this and the conversion to academy status which, in its turn, will liberate schools from bureaucratic burdens through 'a streamlined and effective accountability system' (2010f:4). How the mechanics of this connection will work is not touched upon.

In the second foreword from the Secretary of State, the tone differs and leans noticeably towards a vision of education located more closely in the liberal humanist tradition, talking of giving children the 'chance to take their full and equal share in citizenship, shaping their own destiny, and becoming masters of their own fate' and of education 'allowing individuals to choose a fulfilling job, to shape the society around them, to enrich their inner life' (2010f:6). At the heart of this vision, the teacher is envisaged as 'society's most valuable asset' (2010f:7). What neither of these forewords address is how the greater freedom and autonomy afforded to either schools or teachers – the terms seem to be interchangeable at this stage – will be effected by anything other than structural changes that, although freeing educators (in whatever form) from centralised control will also hold them accountable to centralised power. What follows in the body of the text does little to disentangle this confusion and concomitant non sequiturs.

The lack of clarity in this legislation becomes more marked the further one reads into the documentation. The following extract from the Executive Summary is instructive in this respect:

> There are many outstanding school teachers and leaders. But teachers consistently tell us that they feel constrained and burdened, required to teach the same limited diet to successive classes of young people. Most children and young people behave well, but teachers consistently tell us

that their authority to deal decisively with bad behaviour has been undermined. More children are participating in education for longer, but the curriculum they are following contains too much that is non-essential and too little which stretches them to achieve standards matching the best in the world.(2010f:8)

The line of argument is difficult to follow here and is illustrative of the conflation of ideas and confusion referred to above. Leaving aside the omission of any reference to the source of those teachers who 'consistently tell us' that they feel constrained in their teaching, the immediate elision of this observation with the problems of poor behaviour is peculiar – unless it were to specifically to acknowledge the link between curriculum provision and behaviour that was identified by Dewey over a century ago (Dewey, 1902) and seemingly ignored by policy makers in the intervening decades. Then, in a further twist, we are referred to the idea of 'non-essential' content – to which we shall return shortly - and thence to the need to keep pace with international economic competitors.

What follows now, by way of further, more detailed explanation, underlines the central paradox of how, 'having freed schools from external control', there remains a need to 'hold them effectively to account for the results they achieve' (2010f:8). At the core of this argument sits the contradiction so widely identified during respondents' interviews: the exhortations towards taking greater, more autonomous and authoritative control are articulated simultaneously with prescriptive direction within a framework of high-stakes scrutiny. This is illustrated most clearly when the White Paper, within a few paragraphs (2010f:10-11) reiterates the idea that too much of what is taught in schools is non-essential while going on to state the government's intention to 'specify a tighter, more rigorous model of knowledge which every child should expect to master' by a certain age. The 'greater autonomy' – the details of which remain unspecified – that schools will enjoy under this regime, will, along with the use of recognised 'benchmarks', be instrumental in avoiding 'a prescriptive straightjacket into which all learning must be squeezed.' The set of clear directives that immediately follow raises the

question of how, exactly, this may be the case. There will be an emphasis on 'core subjects' and the use of the teaching of synthetic phonics 'as the best method for teaching reading'. The introduction of the English Baccalaureate, with six set subject areas, will be a benchmark for the success of schools. Age-related testing, with results made public, will remain the chief tool for judging school effectiveness. Beyond these measures, 'gaming behaviour' (2010f:13), whereby schools over-rehearse for vital tests or manipulate examination entries and outcomes to enhance and demonstrate successes, will be addressed by putting 'far more information into the public domain' and through the 'reform of league tables.' Most respondents in this study found it difficult to understand how any professional autonomy could be exercised while league tables that relied largely on unmediated raw material were in place (see Chapters 8-10): the White Paper's commitment to reformed tables with even more information available holds the prospect of an even more directed drive towards the production of even more desired outcomes.

A section dealing with pupil behaviour is worth taking some time to consider along with a reflection of the prominence given to this concept and the importance placed on it in this documentation. To myself, as a practitioner in challenging classrooms and as a teacher educator for thirty-six years, it is self-evident that the importance of pupil behaviour in a teacher's life cannot be overstated; for many teachers it is often the overriding consideration of their professional lives. To treat it with such due regard is entirely understandable, albeit that, characteristically, the government view invokes a golden age of teacher authority that needs 'restoring' (2010f:32) in its approach to this issue. However, the proposed measures reveal much about the precepts and preoccupations of the legislators. Immediate reference is made to powers of search and the use of force – echoing a predilection for a discourse around authority implicit in the encouragement of members of the armed forces to be drafted into the teaching workforce (2010f:22). The encouragement to take strong stands against bullying behaviour and the use of detention are already regarded by most teachers as an unremarkable part of their daily routine. The ire displayed by those respondents who provided written responses to the Secretary of State's parliamentary speech on the White Paper (Chapter 8)

give some indication as to how little understanding such proposals demonstrate in terms of these teachers' daily working lives, with his comments failing to recognise the energy that most teachers expend in implementing such measures without the need of prompts from a distance. The documentation comes closest to addressing these when it talks, in terms however vague, of the daily, unspectacular disruption that blights the lives of many professionals:

> We want all teachers to be clear about the powers they have to deal with disruption in the classroom and to have confidence in exercising their authority. Teachers tell us that they are not clear about what they can do, and that existing powers do not equip them to discipline effectively. So we will strengthen and simplify the existing position and powers, ensuring that teachers feel supported and protected when they address difficult behaviour.(2010f:33)

The extent of this assurance is developed only in one further comment which promises to enable 'Head teachers to support their teachers to maintain good discipline in the classroom every day by establishing a whole school culture that promotes respect, safety and good behaviour' (2010f:34). At no point in this section does the legislation make any correspondence between enhancing the authority – or autonomy – of a teacher through granting that teacher any greater influence over what is taught, the rationale behind such decisions or the methodology employed for any subsequent implementation. For the legislation to ignore such a basic connection – one that is at the centre of much advice given to those at the very start of teacher education courses - is a rather extraordinary omission.

Notwithstanding the apparent 'importance' of the teacher in the document's title, the contents of the White Paper appear to pay scant regard to practitioners' preoccupations as revealed in respondents' interviews and written comments. What follows in the examination of those parts of this paper that are concerned with training and recruitment of teachers, along with the further discussion document on 'training' (the terminology is relevant; many

teacher educators prefer the term 'teacher education') and standards (DfE, 2011a and b) is a conceptualisation of a teacher and teaching that fits the neo-liberal paradigm of measurability aligned to accountability, the primacy of market forces and the hand of the state to steer the course in the event of mishap.

The twelve page section on Teaching and Leadership (2010f:19 - 31) places most of its emphasis on the establishment of structures that 'will free schools from externally imposed burdens and give them greater confidence to set their own direction' (2010f:31). Beyond this assertion, no detail is given, other than an undertaking not to impose central templates for lesson planning (2010f:30), which do not, in fact, currently exist. There is little else that has an impact on serving teachers other than measures mooted to help them 'renew their passion' (2010f:24) by applying for professional development through schemes, the funding for which potential applicants will have to compete. The centrality of competitive market forces is reinforced by an unequivocal commitment to payment for 'good' performance and the use of bursaries and extra payments as incentives for those willing to make appointments in curriculum areas that have become difficult to fill – principally in mathematics and science. The section provides facility for headteachers to exercise discretionary payments and to pay off the student loans of prospective teachers. In a telling illustration, pay and pay flexibilities are mentioned on a dozen occasions and, in a section in which teaching forms part of the title, the terms 'curriculum', 'theory' and' pedagogy' are entirely absent.

While these terms are not employed, the section makes fifteen mentions of the term 'practice', preceded on each occasion by either 'good', 'best' or 'effective'. This emphasis is indicative of the policy's promotion of school-based training and the elevation of some schools to the status of Teaching Schools (2010f:20). 'On the job' training is mentioned on four occasions and there are ten references to the charitable organisation Teach First which recruits highly-qualified graduates, often on a short-term basis, to teach in challenging schools with no formal training. While 'some of the best higher education providers of initial teacher education' (2010f:23) may be invited to

participate in the process of training teachers, the role of such institutions appears to be limited.

What emerges from this section, which ostensibly expresses the need to place the teacher at the centre of the educational process, appears to be the conception of that same teacher as a craft oriented techno-rationalist, learning that craft at the elbow of those well acquainted with an accepted version of 'best' or 'effective' practice – a situation highly redolent of Bourdieu's notion of the replication of culture. As we turn to look at the set of revised Standards for teachers formulated by the coalition government, this concept seems to be further reinforced.

6.1.3 Teachers' Standards

The White Paper promises to look at the Standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), noting that there are 33 such Standards 'only one of which focuses solely on teaching and learning' (DfE, 2010f:26). It goes on to promise that:

> We will ensure that the new standards have a stronger focus on key elements of teaching, including: the best approaches to the teaching of early reading and early mathematics, how best to manage poor behaviour, and how to support children with additional needs, including Special Educational Needs. (2010f: 26)

The revised Standards are framed under eight main headings with a number of subsections amounting ultimately to 35 requirements along with an addendum on professional conduct. The preamble to the section on the Standards makes it clear that adherence to them is a professional requirement that has implications for pay and career progression, stating explicitly that 'we are proposing that teachers' performance will be assessed against the standards as part of new performance management arrangements in schools' (DfE, 2011b:3).

The 'stronger focus' on specific elements of teaching is embodied in two particular directives. The first of these is the requirement when 'teaching early reading' to 'demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics' (2011b: 6) and the second in the less prescriptive need when teaching early mathematics to 'demonstrate a clear understanding of appropriate teaching strategies' (2011b:6). Children's learning is only mentioned on two occasions with only one reference to teachers demonstrating an understanding of how this takes place (2011b:6). Reference to pedagogy and learning theories are completely absent and there is one reference to the need to be aware of children's social and intellectual development. There is one mention of a requirement for teachers to contribute to the design of 'an engaging curriculum' (2011b:7) with all other reference to the term being made in the context of teachers having knowledge of current curricula.

The undertaking to strengthen the focus on 'how best to manage poor behaviour' is difficult to locate. It is worth looking in some detail at any precise development from previous Standards that exemplify this promised reinforcement. The previous requirement for teachers had been embodied in two Standards that articulated the need to 'establish a purposeful and safe learning environment conducive to learning and identify opportunities for learners to learn in out-of-school contexts' along with the necessity to 'establish a clear framework for classroom discipline to manage learners' behaviour constructively and promote their self-control and independence' (Teacher Development Agency). Other than an extrapolation of the central ideas embedded in these expectations, the revised Standards appear to cover the same ground and express the same central concerns when they exhort teachers to have clear rules and routines for behaviour in classrooms, have high expectations of behaviour and establish a framework for discipline, manage classes effectively and maintain good relationships with pupils. There is little here to distinguish between these 'new' standards and the apparently cumbersome and restrictive ones that they are intended to replace. Respondents, including headteachers (Chapters 8-10) make reference to a perceived haste in the formulation of current policy and there appears to be

evidence of this when looking at aspects of the impetus and direction of these initial policies of the coalition government. An apparent discarding of theoretical knowledge, a preference for on on-the-job training and a seemingly populist emphasis on the imposition of firm discipline form the basis for such policy. This seems to be underlined in the following section that scrutinises the final piece of pending legislation that affects teachers in terms of plans for their initial training.

6.1.4 Training our next generation of outstanding teachers

A brief comment about this government discussion document (DfE, 2011a), along with the consideration of the Higher Education White Paper in the next section, is worthwhile because of the way in which both reinforce the idea of teaching and education as being projects that are driven by a notion of the production of human capital. The measures proposed cannot be disaggregated from a discourse of value for money, accountability and measurability underwritten by a topically all-pervasive societal discourse around the requirement to cut public expenditure. The need to make 'better investment' (2011a:8) predominates in much of the document in which, in an expression of (one imagines) unintended banality, the need to provide training that 'is more effective in preparing trainees to be successful in the classroom' (2011a:3) is the expressed intention. The slight on current provision, intended or otherwise, is one that does not go unnoticed by respondents in their written and spoken comments on the Secretary of State's proposals (Chapter 8).

The document reiterates the White Paper's confidence in the efficacy of the Teach First scheme, reminds the reader of the need to keep pace with international competitors and restates the central importance of the use of synthetic phonics and the need to maintain orderly behaviour. Once again, the structural changes embodied in the Academies Act are seen as the instrument which will enable progress to be made on these fronts along with the recruitment and retention of a stronger teaching force, notwithstanding a recognition of the fact that 'we have in our schools today the best generation of teachers we have ever had' (2011a:3). This already strong professional

body will be enhanced by a recruitment process that will become more rigorous and thorough and will be 'incentivised' (2011a:10) by such measures as targeted training bursaries and a more open market to allow an expanded range of 'high quality providers into the system' (2011a:10). Further to this, training providers will need to put their employability record in to the public domain as 'an incentive to encourage better retention rates' (2011a:10).

Central to the case of the need for the reform of teacher training is the argument promoted in the document that 'there are some general lessons about what makes for the best quality provision' (2011a:13) and, consistent with the policy preference for school-based training, this approach enjoys continuing advocacy. To substantiate this claim, work by Musset et al (2010) is cited on three separate occasions (13). The layout of the document does not include details of this or any other reference; all such citations are simply identified in footnotes. Musset's work is notable for two reasons. The first is that the European countries on which her findings are based do not include England or another UK country. The second is the fact that it is relatively difficult to locate – a difficulty noticed and shared by the *Times Educational Supplement* (TES, 2011). However, work by Menter (2010) which identifies the finding that 'where teachers have extensive initial training in schools, they perform better' has defeated the searching efforts of this writer. An email exchange in September, 2011 confirmed that the author himself was no clearer about the provenance of the reference than myself. Work by Reinhartz and Stetson from 1999, which, apparently, supports the importance of school-based training, is equally difficult to locate and is not listed on their website at the Texas Christian University. Finally, the simple characterisation of work by Ingvarson, Meiers and Bevis (2005) as being evidence of the unsurprising fact that 'schools providing learning opportunities have a significant influence on a new teacher's development' (2011a:13) is a somewhat misleading summary of wide–ranging research that is not, in fact, confined to new teachers, but deals with the subject of professional development for Australian teachers with more than ten years' experience (Ingvarson et al, 2005:3).

In a further indication of the lack of importance attributed to theoretical and pedagogical understanding discussed above – and earlier in this study in Chapter 3 – the term 'pedagogy' is not used at any point in the document. The only mention of theory is to observe that 'there is some evidence that university-based trainees see their training as too theoretical' (2011a:14). On this occasion there is no indication of any sort as to the source of this evidence. Reference to practice is, once again, widespread with brief case studies (2011a:14, 17) demonstrating the advantages of schools taking the lead in training teachers. Alongside this a number of financial measures are proposed to make it easier for schools to become involved with training, albeit with an acknowledgement that universities may have some part to play in the process. Principal among the financial arrangements would be an increase in some funding to allow trainees to 'take on more teaching responsibilities as they are training' (2011a:11) in an attempt to make the employment of such trainees attractive to schools.

Two central lines of argument run through this document which are prevalent reflections of topical policy – those of value for money and the privileging of practice over theory, the latter probably representing the triumph, perhaps, of the (contested) notion of common sense. Looking at a final manifestation of this dominant ideology, the next section comments on how this is played out in proposed policy for Higher Education in England.

6.1.5 The Higher Education White Paper: *Students at the Heart of the System*

The coalition's plans for the funding of higher education are embodied in the White Paper published in June, 2011 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). Although not central to the discussion of this particular study, it is worth a brief reflection on this piece of legislation for a number of reasons. The first of these is the social and political impact of the coalition government's proposals as they became clear in the autumn of 2010, prompting the first large-scale student demonstrations in England for decades. Central to the objections and concerns expressed by these protests,

and the societal debate that they generated, was an examination of the precept of the commodification of education – exacerbated in the minds of the student protestors by the fact that these measures were being prosecuted by those who had been the benefactors of a system which valued a more liberal view of education and that had been both free at the point of delivery and subsidised by the state (*Guardian*, Nov., 2010).

Further to this immediate impact, the broader issues of marketization, value for money and consumer choice are just as prevalent here as in other legislation and proposals affecting education. The Higher Education White Paper immediately frames the proposals against the background of the requirement to cut a budget deficit and establishes the clear need to cement a principle of 'pay as you earn' (2011:4) to meet accrued student debts. Along with this go the precepts of 'putting financial power into the hands of learners' with the centrality of the consumer being reinforced by the need of all universities to 'offer a good student experience to remain competitive' (2011:5). In an echo of the importance of the structural changes effected by the academies project, new providers will be encouraged to come forward to supply educational services and all providers, both new and established, will be obliged to place an increased set of data into the public domain of which employability of students will be one of the most important elements. Having set the outlines of particular tariffs, the spirit of this legislation, particularly as it pertains to the interests of this study, is captured perfectly in the comment that the intended outcome of the proposed changes is to provide 'value for money…delivered by a range of providers with different business models' (2011:7). In terms of viewing teacher autonomy against the background of the prevalent ideological drivers of the newly installed government, this brief summary of the proposals for Higher Education is significant in the way that it re-emphasises the ubiquity of political messages being conveyed about education. It is also worth considering that for some of the teachers in this study, new arrangements for the funding of higher education would have been of acute and immediate concern for some of their students. Such concern would, in another instance of the discourse of value for money in education, have been compounded by the abolition of the Education Maintenance

Allowance (EMA) for some 16-18 years olds announced in January, 2011(DfE, 2011d).

Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to take stock of how the elements of policy driven by neo-liberal thinking manifest themselves in legislation enacted in the period when the interviewing of respondents took place. Much of the argument that follows is informed by the notion that it is unconscionable to believe that respondents could have been untouched by the contemporary societal discourse of national and international financial crisis. Even given that the disposition of this particular study is rooted in critical social theory and Marxist politics, the lived experience of respondents could not have failed to have been affected by such obvious circumstances. Having considered the proliferation of educational policy and the haste of some of its construction, the study now moves to the beginnings of its principal purpose, which concerns itself with the question as to whether, against the apparent weight, speed and force of such policy making, any true idea of teacher autonomy can exist and survive.

From the theoretical basis established through the examination of material conditions in Chapters 2 to 6, we now move on to the outlining of research methodology, design, planning and implementation which lays the basis for the investigation into teachers' professional autonomy that follows.

Chapter 7

Methodology: using critical theory to frame the data

Chapters 2 – 6 established the theoretical basis of the study, recognising the political and ideological factors that have an impact on teacher autonomy. This chapter explains the methodological approach and methods used. It places this approach within the wider methodological paradigm of critical theory, arguing that that this captures, as far as is possible, a version of teachers' lived experience in relation to their views about their professional autonomy. It considers such experience against the backdrop of the wider social, political and economic factors discussed thus far. It explains the rationale behind using semi-structured interviews as the principal means of eliciting information and ideas, while acknowledging pitfalls and caveats implicit within this approach.

7.1   A study informed by critical theory: a reflection on the use of qualitative data.

The following section explains the methodological approach of this study which is based on an adoption of the paradigm of critical theory. This approach can best be traced from the work of Habermas and the Frankfurt School (Geuss, 1981) and has its roots in a rejection of methodological paradigms that neglect any appreciation of political and ideological contexts. Seeing its purpose as the interrogation of how power operates and reinforces its position, it sets an agenda informed by notions of emancipation, change and redress. It seeks to uncover whose interests are being served by any given system and questions the legitimacy of those interests. Given the centrality of this notion of emancipation, Habermas himself characterises the purpose of critical theory as being to restore to consciousness what he sees as suppressed behaviours with a view to their eventual dissolution (Habermas, 1984). The semi-structured interviewing of teachers, which is the principal, but not sole, method of data collection in this study, is an attempt to reveal where such suppressions exist, if at all, and whether or not liberation

from them is part of the agenda of those involved or, indeed, those who have a degree of power to alter the conditions that have allowed them to exist.

As the tutor of serving teachers embarking on educational research for the first time, it is informative to have initial discussions with such students about the nature of research and what it can do. Many come to the enterprise with ideas of 'proof' and 'discovery' firmly implanted in their consciousness. Many distrust the very idea of qualitative research as somehow being ephemeral, over-subjective and lacking academic gravity. At the outset of their studies there is a suspicion of anything that does not have measurable, specific outcomes: speculation as a means of potential illumination is treated with misgiving. Such scepticism is not surprising: existing, as they do, in a culture of measurement and regulation, where stark outcomes are the order of the day, there is nothing outlandish in teachers suspecting that those things which cannot be clearly defined and delineated will be treated as credible by those in powerful positions. As the final chapter of this study on the implications for policy will illustrate, it could be argued that such uncertainty about qualitative data is not necessarily misplaced because of the way in which it is mistrusted by decision makers at the highest level. It is, therefore, important to look at where such thinking may have its roots.

 Agger (2006:192) in a robust attack on what he calls the 'hegemony of positivism', identifies what he believes to be have been a migration of theory away from sociology departments in his native USA towards policy that subjugates critical theory at every turn. His observations are the culmination of a thesis that locates the hostility and distrust of parts of the academy, particularly outside Europe, towards anything that is non-quantifiable or which fails to 'achieve the methodological standards of science' (2006:146). This academic rift is, of itself, located in the much wider discourse of a scepticism directed towards European commentators – Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault et al - and in a view of the world that attempts to privilege positivism over interpretivism, determinism over voluntarism, at every turn. When Agger turns from defence to attack, however, he characterises the value of critical social theory in the following way:

> Critical social theory is a way of listening to writing that emphasises the responsibility of writing to change the world – to pierce mythologies and ideologies, to debunk cant and dogma, to unpack cultural representations that reproduce the existing society, to make connections between oppressions……No longer can we simply accept the notion that 'social facts' exist independent of theoretical frames and writing. (2006:188)

He argues that critical social theory issues a challenge to mere 'method' – that which attempts to find answers to problems - as if such problems lived outside the confines of the living, breathing world in which, for the purposes of my particular study, workers work, teachers teach and children attempt to learn. An over–reliance on 'method' alone leads to a situation where technique is given primacy over ontology and Agger argues that such techniques seem to 'clutter' the pages of academic journals while simultaneously abandoning a true theoretical centre.

The prevalent distrust of the non-quantifiable research has had an echo in many of the comments of educational policy makers in England in the last two decades (Hargreaves,1996; Tooley, 1996; Hillgate et al, 1998). A news story from the *Times Higher Education Supplement* some six months after the election of New Labour in 1997 is illuminating, demonstrating a firm belief in the quest for 'what works' in education :

> The Teacher Training Agency met for the first time under new chairman Clive Booth this week, with a new remit. Education Secretary David Blunkett called on the agency to clamp down on educational research that was not applied. 'Research has historically not been closely related to the improvement of classroom practice. This must change.'(*Times Higher Education Supplement*, 1997)

In later comments, Blunkett (2000) argued even more vehemently for the establishment of an educational research community that would concern itself almost exclusively with enhancing Britain's place in the global market

(Lawn and Furlong, 2009). These expressions of a commitment to the superiority of empiricism over mere theory are bound up with the suspicion, identified by Agger, about anything which is clouded by such complications as political circumstance and belief, or the effects and outcomes of social policy. It is promoted by those who 'purge their writing of speculation and social criticism and thus foster the distinction between theory and empiricism as a distinction between speculation and valid science' (Agger, 2006:185). Similarly, House (2005) identifies the 'value-fact dichotomy' (2005:1072) explaining the tendency of neo-liberal – and, indeed, neo-conservative – governments to seek incontrovertible findings as if such results could be validated without reference to the distribution of 'success' and any concomitant effect on social justice.

The importance here is to illustrate that an approach to research that presupposes a *tabula rasa* onto which can be inscribed 'findings', as if society went about its business free from the entanglements of a multi-faceted, inter-related set of influences, is highly questionable. Althusser captures the critique of such compartmentalised thinking when he observes that 'what …seems to take place outside ideology (to be precise, in the street), in reality takes place in ideology' (Althusser, 1969:163). At the time of writing this particular section, a high-profile and interesting non-educational instance of the intellectual frailty of regarding research as clear-cut and objective, whilst ignoring its social, political and historical background, exists around the dismissal of the government's principal drugs adviser, David Nutt, in 2009. The research of Nutt and colleagues provided a 'comprehensive and transparent process for assessment of the danger of drugs' which involved 'a formal, quantitative assessment of several aspects of harm' (Nutt et al, 2007:1052). This ultimately resulted in a recommendation to the government of the lowering of the danger classification of cannabis. Concerned about the public reaction to this apparent softening, Nutt was dismissed by the then Home Secretary – who, in an event that has some resonance with this study, had moved to that office after being Secretary of State for Education - whose explanation to the UK parliament for so doing makes interesting and instructive reading:

There is no doubt in my mind that advice of independent, scientific advisers is essential to many aspects of the government's work…. The role of such advisers is to provide independent advice to government based on their professional, scientific expertise. The role of government is to consider that advice carefully, *along with all other relevant factors*, and for this House to endorse or reject those decisions where appropriate. (Johnson, 2009 – my emphases)

What this serves to expose is an element of double-think on the part of those in power towards research. Such research is 'useful', it seems, when it is hard-nosed, objective and can be used to generate 'results' that can be instrumental in the framing of common-sense policy. However, when these results run counter to desired political outcomes, power has no problem with citing 'other relevant factors' of their own which can cut across the findings of the researcher. Demeritt (2000) identifies a specific form of social contract for research that yields funding for projects that comply with government priorities, particularly in terms of increased accountability. The extent to which power influences the nature and direction of educational research is dealt with at some length in the final discussion of this study (Chapter 11). Such discussion demonstrates the requirement for researchers to tailor their efforts towards the sort of enterprises that will provide evidence correspondent to the current priorities of ministers as a prerequisite for proper audience with them (Lawn and Furlong, 2009). Critical theory challenges the arrangement whereby academics and researchers look, in the first instance, to the suitability and acceptability of their findings on the part of power.

Implicit in critical theory is the possibility of prompting change 'from below' in which, after Gramsci, teachers may begin to question the consent to domination that is axiomatic to the perpetuation of hegemonic ideology. The purpose of this study is to work collaboratively with teachers, examining their current practice while also analysing its provenance and speculating about future developments. To do so prompts an inevitable engagement with considerations of power and a willingness to 'ask questions about what has

come to be…whose interests are served by particular institutional arrangements, and where our frames of reference come from' (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000:303). These authors expand upon the possibilities of such research, characterising it as potentially producing the sort of 'dangerous knowledge' that upsets institutions and threatens to overturn sovereign regimes of truth (2000: 279).

There is, admittedly, a touch of grandeur in such a claim that may not be immediately recognised by a classroom practitioner struggling with the demands of an inspection regime or the need to produce a list of test results. Nonetheless, a study which has as one of its fundamental purposes an attempt to investigate the strength, or vulnerability, of current hegemony, must begin with an understanding of the way in which, as Gramsci argues, dominant power is exercised in a social psychological way that 'not only justifies and maintains its domination but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules' (Gramsci, 1971: 245). Gramsci's argument has, at its base, the proposition that the formation of such hegemony cannot be separated from the production of ideology. Buffeted and assaulted by political ideologies that promote the ideas of common sense, along with mantras about there being no alternative or, latterly, in the wake of the crash of 2008, of us all 'being in this together', Kincheloe and Martin's characterisation of research in the critical social tradition has resonance both for researcher and interviewees:

> Research in the critical tradition takes the form of self-conscious criticism – self-conscious in the sense that researchers try to become aware of the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform their research as well as their own subjective, intersubjective, and normative reference claims. (2005: 305)

At this juncture it is worth restating the direction of this particular study and articulating why the paradigm of critical social theory provides a suitable framework within which to conduct the particular investigation that follows. The study asks how teachers have found themselves in a position where it

could be that their intuitive values and judgements could have become subsumed by an agenda dominated by notions of productivity and performativity underwritten by strong managerialism - themselves the manifestations of Marx's concept of a dominant ideology. Following from this the question arises as to whether the capture of the 'soul of the teacher' is either complete or irreversible. Investigation of this question, and the implications that stem from it, is the central purpose of this study. Implicit within the formulation of critical theory, to reiterate earlier reference to Habermas, is the purpose of examining social conditions in order to uncover 'hidden' structures with a view to effecting the eventual dissolution of suppressed behaviours. The corollary of this is that exposing the ways in which oppression operates opens up the possibilities of oppositional action – itself the very basis of the fundamental Marxist precept of the centrality of independent workers' action. The methodological approach of this study *attempts* – and the conditionality of this is further underlined in comments that follow about the conduct and analysis of interviews – to reveal where some of the false consciousness inherent in such an analysis may lie. The interview, which attempts as far as it is possible to do so – and once again it is worth noting the limitations acknowledged below about gaining windows into souls - is used here as the method best perceived to explore this idea.

This consideration of critical social theory also contains a clear warning to the researcher to recognise his own ideological and ontological position. This is addressed in sections that follow which outline the process of data collection and in the subsequent chapter which examines the composition of the interview cohort and the way in which the interviews themselves were conducted.

The broad outline of the data collection process is given here to inform the wider argument in the discussion that follows about interviewing as a research method:

- Face-to-face interviews with teachers, conducted in May/June and November/December 2010.

- Email responses, prompted by the researcher, and responded to solely at the wish of the respondents, in relation to policy announcements from the coalition government.
- Face-to-face interviews with headteachers and others close to policy-making and implementation, conducted in March/April, 2011.
- Brief email correspondence with a different cohort of teachers in December, 2011.

In keeping with the precepts of critical theory, the first round of interviews with teachers are contextualised by the inclusion of a commentary on the policy announcements of the coalition government in the months immediately following its installation in May, 2010. To re-emphasise the point: the exchanges with these teachers attempt to capture how they experience something of the range of forces beyond the everyday that may, or may not, influence their actions and thoughts in their professional role. That the initial interviews took place at a time of intense political upheaval was coincidental but serves the purpose of bringing such 'external' factors into sharp relief.

7.2   The interview as a means of gathering data

Oakley (1981) when talking of the use of interviewing in research characterises the situation in this succinct comment:

> interviewing is rather like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets. (1981:31)

It is widely accepted (Atkinson and Silverman, 1977; Scheurich, 1995; Fontana and Frey, 2005; Cohen et al, 2009) that the intrusion implicit within any interview, irrespective of attempts at objectivity, can blur the very objectivity that it sets out to achieve. Notwithstanding this, the following prompts that were framed for the initial interviews of this study attempt to ask teachers about their view of professional autonomy in as open and non-

directional a manner as possible, each question prompting respondents to begin with their personal thoughts or beliefs.

1. *Could you explain what you think being a professional teacher means to you?*
2. *Do you believe that you act as an autonomous professional?*
3. *Do you believe that you are trusted as a professional?*
4. *Do you think that there are any external pressures that affect your ability to act as an autonomous professional?*
5. *Do you think that there may be ways in which your professional autonomy could be enhanced?*

These open-ended questions also draw on the following observations made by this author from an entirely separate professional consultancy exercise undertaken between July and September, 2009, during which eight teachers responded to a variety of questions about their involvement in experiments in curricular innovation:

1. Teachers required little prompting to talk about their professional roles and practice. Scrutiny of audio recordings revealed minimal intervention from the interviewer.
2. Teachers talked with obvious enthusiasm, often using the word 'passion', unprompted, about those aspects of their practice that, in their view, genuinely enhance the progress and engagement of their students.
3. Teachers almost all responded to questions about professionalism in terms of their working relationships with students.

As a consequence, the initial interviews in this study are framed in a semi-structured way with the five, open-ended prompts used as stimuli. The term 'professionalism' when used in the initial consultancy project appeared to divert teachers from talking about the detailed composition of their practice as set against the demands of the 'regulatory gaze' (Osgood, 2006). This was demonstrated in two ways. The first, and most common, was expressed

purely in terms of what can best be described as an overwhelming desire to do the best by students in the classroom and beyond. The second was a rather closed interpretation of conformity with the expectations of their particular institution – a position consistent with Evetts' (2005) characterisation of organisational professionalism or, as one outspoken respondent dismissively dubbed it, 'being a good girl and doing what you're told.' As a consequence, apart from the opening question of the first interviews, which is intended principally as something of an ice-breaker establishing the general field of enquiry, the term 'autonomy' is used in an attempt to prompt comment about individual decision making in the course of prosecuting teaching and learning.

7.3 The use of semi-structured interviews: considerations and caveats

The value of the semi-structured interview is that it allows respondents to tell the interviewer what s/he does not already know, even though it may be the case that the interviewer has reached a point at which both the purpose of the research has been decided and the methodological approach has been determined (Fontana and Frey, 2005; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). In terms of the theoretical thrust of this study this fits perfectly; such interviews allow the respondent to stray and digress (as, indeed, some do from time to time) while 'permitting' the interviewer to re-direct the conversation towards such a purpose. Such interviews do not attempt to rigidly pre-categorise responses into a codable set of data, but rather to capture the lived experience of those involved: to 'establish the complex behavior (sic) of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of enquiry' (Fontana and Fey, 2005:706). Given that information for such interviews has, by its very nature, to be individual and non-standardised, albeit contained within a certain, if initially unproven, thesis, the semi-structured interview is one method that allows the researcher to acquire such information (Cohen et al, 2009:354).

However, if the semi-structured, qualitative interview has its supporters, even they are clear that there are pitfalls that need to be avoided. Fundamental to this understanding is the clear realisation that any interviewer brings to the situation a collection of predilections and expectations, conscious or unconscious, along with personal and academic bias that needs to be recognised. As a practitioner in the field under investigation, as well as being an active, committed trade unionist and campaigner in this area, such a consideration is of acute importance for this author. Understanding these preconditions is critical, as is the fact that interviews will reveal ambiguities, surprises and non-sequiturs. Unremitting honesty, rigour and ethical behaviour in the approach to the process is an integral part of the whole operation if one is to follow Stake's rule for the prosecution of reliable casework of placing one's 'best intellect into the thick of what is going on' (Stake, 2000:445).

Other caveats apply. Scheurich (1995) argues that any form of interviewing is fundamentally flawed as it is an essentially modernist concept and Yin (2009) suggests that beyond the presuppositions brought by the interviewer, the responses of interviewees 'are subject to the common problems of bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation' (2009:109) – albeit that this latter category did not appear to be especially germane to these particular groups of teachers. Fontana and Fey (2005) identify a number of considerations that an interviewer must acknowledge, including the gendered nature of some encounters, along with very act of interviewing in a society in which TV chat shows and 24 hour rolling news have created a situation where the right to be heard is part of a growing discourse. After Derrida, an attention to slipperiness and disconnectedness runs through all such warnings, along with the expression of caution about any conclusions drawn that, according to Atkinson and Silverman (1977), can only create an end product that is a pastiche constructed, ultimately, as a reflection of the predilections of the researcher. Once again, the researcher is left to acknowledge such notes of caution and recognise their importance when collecting and analysing data.

Finally, the conduct of the interview itself needs to be carefully considered. Gorden (1992) reminds the interviewer that, 'interviewing skills are not simple motor skills like riding a bicycle; rather they involve a high-order combination of observation, empathetic sensitivity, and intellectual judgement' (1992:7). Silverman (2006) warns us that it is presumptuous of any interviewer to believe that we are able to read someone's mind along with a warning that 'it is somewhat naïve to assume that open-ended or non-directive interviewing is not in itself a form of social control which shapes what people say' (2006:125). Underlining the requirement for the interviewer to remain constantly wary of clear or simplistic interpretation, Silverman urges the researcher to 'recognise that 'experience' is no more or less 'authentic' but is narrated in ways that are open to investigation' (2006:395).

An understanding and recognition of such notes of caution informs the direction of this study. Fundamentally, honesty and partnership need to be at the base of what takes place and to this end, respondents were given transcripts of interviews, with some of them choosing to annotate these or to expand verbally on what they had said as they saw fit in further interviews and written submissions. The ethical considerations of informed consent, the right to privacy and protection from harm are all at the centre of a project that goes some way to produce results that 'advocate social polices and ameliorate the condition of the interviewee' (Fontana and Frey, 2005:696) and, as such, involve respondents as more than interview fodder. The sharing of findings and conclusions should act as a brake on the predomination of the interviewer's own views and agenda (Cohen at al, 2009), resulting in a situation where the outcome is seen as a negotiated accomplishment that can be of use to the practice of both parties (Fontana and Frey, 2005). The willingness of teachers throughout this project to volunteer information and to engage with the overall process is a very strong indication of how this study can be seen to be such a negotiated venture.

This element of partnership is an important factor in this study. The nature of the semi-structured interview allows the process to be one of genuine *inter-action* (Kvale, 1996), addressing the multiplicity of social and personal factors

that could affect any social encounter. However, and against the same background of the interview being a manifestation of any human interaction, the possibility of 'bad' encounters is a constant risk and one which any interviewer cannot fully pre-empt. The solution as Kitwood (1977) points out, is to 'have as explicit a theory as possible to take the various factors into account' (Cohen at al, 2009: 351) and it as that point the framing of this study within the parameters of Marxist and critical theory – as outlined in previous sections – becomes pertinent.

7.4   Some initial observations on data gathering, data analysis and ethical considerations

The following section explains how data were analysed. The purpose of placing this section here, prior to an account of its collection or of the actual analysis itself, is to bring to the fore the notion that the collection and analysis of the data is a pervasive process, one in which, to borrow from Miles and Huberman (1994:50), the researcher has 'cycle(d) back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data.' As well as these authors, the section draws on the work of Silverman (2006, 2010) and Ruben and Ruben (2005) to explain both the theoretical basis of the data analysis and, from there, its immediate practical application in this study. A comment about the ethical consideration for this study is made at the end of this section.

7.5   Data analysis: a theoretical perspective

Previous paragraphs about methodology acknowledge many of the caveats that need to be noted when using interviews as the main means of data collection. Principal among these is the conditionality of any such encounters, contingent as they are on a range of factors such as preconceptions, bias, shifting perceptions and, ultimately, the actions and conduct of the interviewer. In a study of this sort, with its roots firmly in a critique of the economic and political drivers of neo-liberalism, the acknowledgement of topical markers and events (Ruben and Ruben, 2005) is as firm a reminder as

any that the researcher who is attempting to 'get into someone's head' (Byrne, 2004:117) is behaving in a delusional manner by ignoring the impact of these 'outside' events on the changing consciousness of respondents and, indeed, the interviewer.

It is, however, as befits a thesis informed by Marxist theory, worth pointing out that an acknowledgement of this conditionality is definitely not an acceptance of a postmodern approach. Critics of this intellectual current (Eagleton, 1985, 2000; Sopkal and Bricmont, 1997; Callinicos, 2002; Silverman, 2010) lodge their complaint, as does this author, in the equation by the postmodernists of their identification of cultural trends as increasingly self-referential, ironic and conditional with an unwillingness to accept the stability of theory that is supportive and stable and, as such, 'an aid to sober, empirical research – not its replacement' (Silverman, 2010:120). The teachers at the centre of this study may not necessarily articulate or acknowledge an advocacy of a grand narrative approach to the world in which they work, but, as their comments will demonstrate, an enduring (im)balance of forces impinges on most of what they do on a daily basis. Any sense of dislocation or of being decentred experienced by these workers stems from nothing more exotic than the requirements of a system that demands results and productivity, thereby placing them in the invidious position of deciding whether, to put it simplistically, to follow their heart or their head. Postmodern theory does little to explain the ensemble of factors that impinge upon their working lives.

Notwithstanding these comments, the analysis of the collected data is informed by a number of clear precepts. First among these is the acceptance that what is gathered from respondents can never be more than a *version* of the truth, as it appears to them – and the interviewer – at that time. Similarly, it would be disingenuous on the part of the interviewer to assume that no element of control is exercised by, in this case, him. Given that the nature of my relationship with some of this cohort is, for example that of current or ex-lecturer to student (see Chapter 8) it would be naïve to suppose that this has no effect on proceedings or outcomes, irrespective of whatever checks and balances are put in place to pre-empt this. Accepting these potential pitfalls,

measures were put into place prior to and during the interview process. In informal conversations with respondents it was made clear that any tendency to tell the interviewer what respondents thought was 'required' would be distinctly unhelpful. Once recorded, all interviews were listened to again as soon as practicable following their taking place and immediate, initial notes were made about them prior to transcription. Although subject to all of the potential misgivings expressed above, this was an initial step towards capturing an interpretation of 'reality' at an early stage. Ultimately a researcher must attempt to tell the truth; if that truth is, as both postmodernists and their opponents concede, always contingent on other factors, then, to refer again to Stake (2000), the best one can do is to place one's intellect into the thick of it and conduct oneself with academic integrity.

When analysing data, even at the earliest stages, the question as to where importance and emphasis is to be placed is an integral part of the argument about honesty. Here Silverman (2006) in particular offers useful guidelines. Given that an attempt to tell the (a) truth is central to the enterprise, he warns researchers to beware of a number of traps: an anecdote is not proof; the search for hidden truths is foolish; a point of view is not an explanation. Working with a generally open, opinionated and largely eloquent cohort, this proved invaluable advice. Similarly, Silverman is vehement in his advice to researchers to draw a distinction between journalism and research; his insistence that it is in the unremarkable that we can find meaning is important guidance. Along with this goes a reminder that silences, non-verbal actions and body movements also contribute to data – and, as transcripts in this study show, I have, on a number of occasions, drawn attention to these factors, in an attempt to capture the tone and mood or certain contributions, with interjections such as, 'you're clenching your fist as you're making that point' or 'you're grinning all over your face as you're telling me this.' Silverman notes the requirement to do more than listen or read by explaining that 'the interpretation of transcripts may be gravely weakened by a failure to note apparently trivial, but often crucial, pauses, overlaps or body movements' (2006:46).

However, for all the appreciation and understanding of conditionality that is brought to the analysis of qualitative data gathered through interview, ultimately the researcher has to believe that what is gathered and analysed is reliable or the exercise becomes fundamentally futile. Critical social theorists argue that the concept of reliability should not be solely the domain of quantitative researchers and, as a consequence, the need to document and scrutinise one's own procedures as a way of defence against accusations of unreliability is of paramount importance (Kirk and Miller, 1986). For that reason, the next section presents an account of the steps taken in this study.

7.6   Collection, interpretation and analysis.

It is worth restating the point above about cycling back and forth: collection, interpretation and analysis did not take place in a linear sequence. Miles and Huberman (1994) warn the researcher that ongoing research, subject to ongoing scrutiny, will reveal 'blind spots' (1994:50) as well as inconsistencies and, of course, surprises. The advice given to guard against this and, along with this, the potential data overload generated as the researcher attempts readjustments, is to construct a pre-structured case as part of a conceptual framework. This advice is worth reproducing here at some length, providing, as it does, as clear an explication as any of the process used in this study:

> Assuming that the researcher has established an explicit conceptual framework, a rather precise set of research questions and a clearly defined sampling plan, the pre-structured case begins with a case outline, developed before any data are collected .The outline is, in effect, a shell for the data to come. Over several rounds of field visits, the researcher fills in successive drafts of the case, revising steadily. (1994:84)

This study starts with a clear conceptual framework and hypothesis: a suspicion that the professional autonomy of teachers has been deeply affected by the prevalent social and economic conditions of neo-liberal hegemony as these precepts work their way down from global financial

institutions through national governments and strata of school management to individual classrooms. Further to this, the study sets out to investigate whether or not the effect of such conditions has entirely eradicated ideas of a more visionary notion of education in schools. A sample of professionals is chosen and a set of questions devised to test this hypothesis; the 'shell'. After initial interviews take place, further questions are developed to interrogate these responses. Written testimonies relating to topical markers (Ruben and Ruben, 2005) are solicited. Further interviews take place along with the identification of a new sample of potentially relevant voices – and so the filling in of the successive drafts gradually, and incrementally, takes place.

In pragmatic, practical terms, what does this mean? Given that the formulation of the conceptual and theoretical framework has been dealt with at some length in Chapters 2-6, this part of the process will not be rehearsed. The chapter that follows this one will deal in detail with the selection and composition of the cohorts. What follows here is a reflexive chronological account of the processes themselves.

In April 2010, having considered the composition of the teacher cohort, 24 teachers were emailed and asked if they would consider participating. Within ten days, 15 of the 24 had responded positively and this had grown to 22 by the end of the month. 17 responses expressed pleasure or enthusiasm – sometimes both – at being involved. Repeated efforts to contact and involve the final two potential respondents were unsuccessful. Institutional ethical clearance was completed, first interviews were arranged for mid-May and all 22 were completed by the early July; these initial interviews were, on average, around thirty minutes long. Interviews were conducted at times and places convenient to respondents – usually in their schools – and all were audio recorded on a digital sound recorder. The following steps were then taken with many of the actions that follow informed by the ideas of Miles and Huberman (1994) and Ruben and Ruben (2005):

- Interviews were listened to as soon as possible as after they had taken place to identify key terms, data units and - once a number of interviews had taken place – emergent concepts and themes.

- Sound files were sent for professional transcription. On return, the transcript and sound file were returned to the respondent for comment or correction. In those cases where respondents chose to comment - which were few - most chose only to correct misheard comments or minor misunderstandings on the part of the transcriber, whose work was, for the main, part, unerringly accurate as well as capturing, where possible, pauses and interruptions (see Appendix 1).

- Interviews were then listened to once more while following the transcripts and annotating them accordingly. In particular, noteworthy quotations or stories that suggest concepts and themes (Ruben and Ruben,2005) were identified.

- During the interviewing period, note-taking centred on identifying patterns, themes, making contrasts and comparisons and, above all, developing conceptual and theoretical coherence (Miles and Huberman,1994).

- Midway through the initial process a coding sheet was devised (see Appendix 2) as themes and concepts began to emerge.

- Once all initial interviews were complete, all respondents were emailed with thanks and were sent a brief progress report on what I intended to do next.

- All transcripts were then read at a sitting and annotated for concepts and themes: further coding sheets were used for numerical recording of recurrences – Miles and Huberman issue a judicious reminder that 'a lot of counting goes on in the background when judgements of qualities are being made' (1994:252).

- An initial draft was written, attempting to capture the process and some early analysis.

In October 2010 the initial cohort was contacted by email and all agreed to a second interview. All respondents were sent a sound file of a radio interview

with the relatively newly installed Secretary of State for Education (Today, 2010), in which he explains his vision for autonomous schools and education, as a starting point for conversation and all but one had listened to some or all of this prior to the second interview. Questions and prompts were framed in a way that attempted to develop the principal themes from the first interview, exploring further the hypothesis that teachers may be able to act in a more autonomous way under a different set of material conditions. These second encounters tended to be, on average, slightly longer that the first meetings, averaging around 35 minutes each. The procedure outlined above was then repeated, with the contemporaneous note-taking concerning itself to an ever increasing degree with interpretation and analysis as much as with identification of themes and concepts.

In January, 2011, I wrote to all respondents with a further link to a recording of a much publicised interview with the Secretary of State (Today, 2011) in which he outlines the purposes of the White Paper (DfE, 2010f), asking respondents to comment if they felt they had the time to do so (see Chapter 8 for details of these). In all, sixteen responses were received from 11 respondents, some of which were little more than two sentences long but with the majority being lengthier, totalling some 4,000 words from all respondents. Feeling that it was both courteous and academically proper to do so as a researcher, I also furnished respondents with my own view – which ran to some 1700 words – and this, in turn, elicited a further five enthusiastic responses. Silverman (2006) emphasises that much educational research is a collaboratively produced venture and this episode endorses such a view.

It was at this point - early February, 2011 – having drafted prose analyses of both sets of interviews, that it occurred to me that a fuller picture from this data – especially as they pertained to implications to the policy and practice of the study's title – could be obtained by hearing a reaction to these initial findings from a new cohort that was closer to the framing and implementation of such policy. As a consequence I approached eight individuals, some of whom I was partially acquainted with and some who were unknown to me, to ask for their participation. Of the eight, four were headteachers, one the

leader of a headteachers' organisation; two were highly experienced educational researchers and one a prominent educational journalist. All replied positively except for one researcher and one headteacher. Interviews were conducted in late March and early April, 2011 with the same process outlined above used once more, with the exception of one interview conducted by telephone. This was the shortest interview at some twenty minutes, with an average of around thirty five minutes for each of the others. The process outlined in the bullet-pointed list above was then replicated for this new cohort.

In December, 2011, when drawing together the main implications from data gathered, it became plain that the notion of professional compliance, as identified by academic commentators in Chapter 4 in particular, had emerged as a key concept for a significant number of respondents from both cohorts. Given that such acquiescence and compliance seemed to be bemoaned by many experienced professionals, a brief email survey, using a Likert scale questionnaire of experienced practitioners, none of whom were among the original respondents, was conducted. The details of this are described in Chapter 11.

In March, 2012, some twelve months after the completion of the interviews, all data were subject to a final investigation. All transcripts were re-read and listened to along with the relevant sound file. In particular, a focus on all of the caveats above attempted to ensure that final drafts concerning data analysis (Chapters 8-10) were as objective and as fair as it is possible to be.

In total, therefore, the following data were gathered for analysis:

- Some 24 hours of teacher interviews with 22 teachers were recorded and transcribed.
- Some 4 hours of interviews were conducted with six people close to the framing, interpretation and implementation of policy. These were recorded and transcribed.

- Some 4,400 words were sent by respondents via email in answer to broadcast comments from the Secretary of State for Education from teachers.

- A further 1,400 words via email was sent to me from 12 experienced teachers along with their responses to a Likert-scale questionnaire.

7.7   Ethical considerations

The study presents few obvious ethical difficulties, notwithstanding Wisker's observation that many researchers embark upon their work unable to anticipate these (Wisker, 2008:86). The suggestions of House (1993) that the central ethical principles of mutual respect, non-coercion and non-manipulation along with the upholding of democratic values (Shaw, 1999) should be in firmly in place – albeit that the final one of these is perennially contestable – are adhered to throughout. Shaw expresses a concern as to whether any qualitative research can be conducted without taking a 'calculated stance towards other human beings' (Shaw, 1999: 166) and Potter (2002) reinforces this by pointing out that 'qualitative work necessarily entails involvement; it cannot be done in an 'objective', neutral, disengaged manner if it is to yield any worthwhile insight into the respondent's world' (Potter, 2002:160). All such reservations have been acknowledged as indicated by previous comments.

The advice that all social researchers should consider 'issues around privacy, informed consent, anonymity, secrecy (and) being truthful' (Blaxter et al, 2006:158) has been closely followed and whilst all of these elements have been recognised, that of 'being truthful' has informed every part of this work, reliant as much of it has been, on the work of fellow professionals whose very occupational interests coincide, in some cases, with my own. The open sharing of all findings and reports from the study with respondents acts as a further reinforcement of the need for truthfulness. As a general observation in this section, it has to be reiterated that notwithstanding criticisms above relating to postmodern theorising, there must be a degree of conditionality

about the findings of this, or any other, qualitative study. This is not an abdication of the requirement for robust and reliable approaches (an area explored in some depth in Chapter 11) but recognition that despite the best efforts of the researcher, slippages could occur. Again, it has to be hoped that sharing both the process and the findings with all respondents can put an effective brake on such potential shortcomings.

Beyond these broader considerations, institutional ethical clearance was obtained and guidelines adhered to. The principal elements from the British Educational Research Association (BERA) advice about ethics were also acknowledged in the work; voluntary, informed consent was obtained, all respondents were fully apprised of the process and all rights to confidentiality and anonymity fully observed.

7.8   Chapter summary

This chapter has explained the theoretical basis behind the process employed to gather data. It argues that the semi-structured interview is the method best suited to capture something of the lived experience of teachers operating within a framework constructed by power to perpetuate its own dominant neo-liberal ideology. The importance of power and how it operates is central to an understanding of this study, hence the adoption of a methodology that is based upon critical theory which advocates an appreciation of the inter-woven nature of how things are and how, under different material conditions, they could be. A Marxist paradigm presupposes the possibilities of resistance and workers' agency, both of which inform some of what follows in the next three chapters and, perhaps more pertinently, in the study's conclusions. These three chapters outline the results from the data-gathering exercise, identifying salient themes and outcomes that will provide insight into the extent and nature of teachers' professional autonomy.

Chapter 8

Playing tick-box games. The first round of interviews with teachers.

This following chapter is the first of three which deal with the collection and analysis of data from two sets of respondents. This chapter begins by outlining the nature of the first interview cohort of serving teachers. It describes my relationship with this group and the way in which it was selected. It then goes on to give an account and analysis of the first round of interviews, conducted between May and July, 2010. The chapter concludes by looking at the highly significant political backdrop to these initial interviews, considering the impact of the UK coalition government's proposals in the White Paper of November, 2010 (Department for Education, 2010f) on this cohort. The subsequent chapter moves to an account and analysis of the follow-up interviews in November and December of 2010. A further chapter then furnishes an account and analysis of the reaction to the findings from the teachers' interviews by some of those charged with framing and implementing policy.

8.1   The teacher interview cohort

This group of interviewees was chosen mainly from individuals known to me as either serving teachers undertaking Continuous Professional Development (CPD) on an education Masters course – not exclusively at my own institution – which applied to 18 of the final cohort. Others were known to me as fellow professionals or as former students on initial teacher education courses. The cohort is correspondent with the notion of a purposive sample (Patton, 1990). A deliberate choice was made to approach individuals who had, in my subjective view, exhibited a committed and overt interest in their professional lives and development – although this does not, necessarily, presuppose a concomitant interest in promotion or advancement. Neither, of course, does it suggest that there is anything unique about such respondents. Given such access to these particular individuals, the problems of 'getting in' to a setting and of understanding the language and culture of respondents (Fontana and

Frey, 2000) are immediately addressed – albeit that caveats expressed immediately below (and also see p.150) about assumptions around shared values need to be heeded.

The extent to which the responses from any cohort of this size can produce results that can be generalised is open to question. Firestone (1993) recognises that there has never been a particularly strong argument for qualitative evidence doing so, but talks of the way in which small cohorts can produce 'rich, thick description' (Firestone, 1993:22) and Cohen et al talk of the value of acquiring in-depth information from 'knowledgeable people' (Cohen et al, 2009:115) who are in a position to supply it. Similarly, Stake (2005) defends the principle of a purposive sample and notes the value of working with those who demonstrate an observable interest in an issue, while Corbin and Strauss (1990) advocate the use of respondents whose accounts facilitate the construction of an overview of particular conditions along with those elements that can make an impact on them. Notwithstanding caveats about potential – or lack of it - for generalisation, the selection of this particular cohort corresponds well to the overall purpose of a study that attempts to reveal something of teachers' professional experience. The impact on the data collected from such a cohort is discussed below.

An approach was made to 24 individuals from across the primary, special and secondary sectors, of whom two failed to respond. Of the 22 positive responses, 15 expressed genuine enthusiasm in their personal email acceptances to me, with much reference to taking pleasure in the process and with the terms 'an honour' and 'privilege' being used in some initial responses. In subsequent messages and conversations many respondents expressed eager interest – and even impatience – about the outcomes of the study. There was no attempt to manufacture a representative cross-section of the teaching community; this cohort was chosen for its energy, commitment and willingness to engage in challenging dialogue and discussion – albeit that such qualities are the result of a subjective interpretation on the part of the author.

There are no headteachers in the cohort although there are three senior leaders and one further member of a senior leadership team. The consideration of the views of those charged with ultimate implementation of policy is left to Chapter 10 of the study when the findings from the interview process are put to them. The gender profile of the cohort of 9 male and 13 female is consistent with the overall profile in England, although the age profile is considerably skewed to the younger end. 11 of the 22 are aged between 20 and 30 and this differs from the UK figure of 20% of teachers in this group (Teachernet, 2010).Similarly, only 3 of the 22 being over 50 is not a reflection of the position of 30% of teachers in England in this bracket. In terms of ethnic minority representation, the cohort, with 5 of the 22 in this category, is not reflective of a profile of some 9% (General Teaching Council for England (GTCE), 2010). These inconsistencies with national figures are accounted for by a selection process whereby those embarking on CPD are more likely to be in the earlier stages of their career and, in terms of ethnicity, of the fact that the study draws upon schools and teachers in and around London.

For the purposes of reporting the findings of the study, respondents have each been allocated a pseudonym which is gender specific. All names chosen are English in nature, irrespective of the respondent's ethnicity, in an attempt to anonymise any obvious indication of particular ethnic or religious characteristics. The act of naming receives little attention in academic circles (Guenther, 2009) and researchers need to acknowledge that this is an act of power that presents ethical, political and personal dilemmas. In choosing this approach, which is acknowledged as imperfect and open to challenge, consideration was made of preserving anonymity within a constituency of potential readers who could feasibly identify respondents. The manner of the naming of the respondents in this study is an attempt to facilitate a narrative coherence for the reader in what follows while furnishing as few indications as possible about identities to fellow professionals. Some respondents were known to each other and some were from the same school. This was never referred to by the interviewer or, indeed, by any of the respondents before, during or after the interviewing process. The definite possibility exists that

some respondents could have spoken to the each other about the project, but I was never made aware of this. A full table of respondents appears below.

The case was made above that the notion of a purposive sample informed the choice of these participants. It was the intention of this study to examine the lived experience of a set of practitioners who were, as far as I could determine, accomplished professionals relative to their experience. Beyond this, the involvement of the bulk of these respondents in post-qualification study was used as another indicator of a degree of professional dedication and, as such, suitability for this exercise. There is no evading the fact that this was a subjective judgement on my part. The willing involvement and enthusiasm of many of these participants enhances the argument about the elements of cooperation and a degree of co-construction in this piece of work. Arising from this, however, is the clear danger of demand characteristics: to what extent could I be certain that there were no features of collaboration, willingness to please, even a degree of cosiness about the relationship between interviewer and respondent? These are important queries arising from the nature and selection of this particular cohort and there are a number of factors in terms of response. First, all respondents were briefed in vigorous terms not to say what they thought would please me: close scrutiny of interviews and their transcriptions reveal that they either did not wish to do so or, alternatively, had no clear conception of what my own predilections may have been in order for them to do so. One could also argue that were they led in any way, there may have been a degree of homogeneity about their responses and, despite the emergence of discernible trends from what was said, this was not the case. The use of a second, separate round of interviews, having afforded the opportunity for review and revision of what was initially said, along with opportunities for submitting written responses to particular topics, also contributes to the formation of as reliable a set of data as possible. For all of the implementation of these measures, there can be no guarantees about the veracity, reliability or, indeed, constancy of any given respondent.

In terms of policy and practice, another observation about the nature of the sample needs to be made. As the outline of the table of respondents and the accompanying text reveal, the sample was not cross-sectional in terms of age, experience or ethnicity. What connects most of them is a dedicated interest in their profession, not inevitably connected to advancement or promotion. As such, a case can be made that although not necessarily a putative leading cadre - the DfE's 'generation of outstanding teachers' – these are the voices of accomplished practitioners which, it might be argued, merit a hearing by power. What emerges from their comments is a deep scepticism about promises to be able to teach as they see fit, along with a widespread identification of the central paradox between government rhetoric and prescription. Even though this may not be a truly representative sample of the profession, I would argue that it would be prudent for policy makers to have regard to such a message from such a committed and well informed cohort.

Bound up with both the choice of paradigmatic approach to research and the nature and selection of the sample is the element of personal bias. Again, notwithstanding a researcher's best efforts, control and recognition of such bias is problematic. One potential rejoinder here may lie in terms of respondent participation. The overall analysis of a sample of interviews indicate that three times as much was said by respondents as by the interviewer and this bald figure does not account for the lengthy passages of uninterrupted contribution that characterise many encounters. For all of this, it is only the close examination of the sound files and transcripts that can reveal the extent of any researcher bias and, it could be argued, even such scrutiny is open to interpretation. As a final observation, the sharing of the outcomes of this research, and the presentation of the final piece of work to respondents who will almost certainly be able to identify themselves, acts as a directive to the researcher to present as independent and reliable an account as possible. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 314) consider such sharing of data and narrative with the participants as 'the most crucial technique for establishing credibility' and such involvement of participants is a central feature of an attempt to attain realism and accuracy (Creswell and Miller, 2000).

Figure 2. Table of respondents

Pseudonym	Gender	Sector	Age	Experience in years at May, 2010
Christine	Female	Secondary	46	20
Danielle	Female	Secondary	33	7
Dianne	Female	Secondary	49	16
Harry	Male	Secondary	31	9
Helen	Female	Secondary	25	3
Jackie	Female	Secondary	29	4
Jean	Female	Secondary	23	1
Kim	Female	Secondary	26	2
Laura	Female	Secondary	27	5
Leanne	Female	Secondary	29	6
Liam	Male	Secondary	20s	1
Malcolm	Male	Special	33	2
Maria	Female	Secondary	50s	27
Marsha	Female	Primary	27	2
Martin	Male	Secondary	25	2
Maurice	Male	Primary	33	4
Max	Male	Secondary	50s	33
Melissa	Female	Primary	41	1
Robert	Male	Primary	27	1
Shaun	Male	Secondary	50s	30
Shona	Female	Primary	28	1
Steve	Male	Secondary	42	15

NB: some respondents chose to give ages in general terms

8.2   The first round of teacher interviews: May – July, 2010

This report and analysis from the first round of interviews broadly corresponds to the order of the prompts for the semi-structured interview as this is a reflection of the way in which the interviews themselves developed. To recap, these five areas were:

1. *Could you explain what you think being a professional teacher means to you?*
2. *Do you believe that you act as an autonomous professional?*
3. *Do you believe that you are trusted as a professional?*
4. *Do you think that there are any external pressures that affect your ability to act as an autonomous professional?*
5. *Do you think that there may be ways in which your professional autonomy could be enhanced?*

In almost all cases, interviews followed this basic framework with, as is to be expected, different emphases dependent on the respondents themselves. On occasion, consistent with the approach of semi-structured interviews, I made judgements about where to let conversations follow the interest of the respondent – often leading to elision with subject matter covered in other prompts – before bringing respondents back to the main foci. Prompts 3 and 4 were usually interpreted *by respondents* as an invitation to talk about Ofsted (and/or observation regimes) and the government and so have been reported in this way accordingly. Guba and Lincoln (2005) identify the problem of the control of any research project of this kind and some of these potential problems have been referred to in earlier paragraphs in this chapter. The control of the interview and, crucially, the potentially damaging assumption that interviewer and respondent are speaking the same language (Fontana and Frey, 2005) needs to be recognised by the interviewer. In this particular instance, there is an obvious danger of communicating, implicitly or otherwise, the desirability of teachers enjoying a degree of professional autonomy. Outcomes which demonstrate that, albeit in a very small number of cases, this

was not a shared aspiration, go some way to demonstrating that the framing of the questions was not overly influential in this way. Measured against such proper warnings is the acknowledgement that a project of this sort, given its foundation in Marxist and critical social theory, has at its base a notion of emancipation and power which dictates that, by its very nature, some of this power must reside with respondents (Fontana and Frey, 2005). As such, the process attempts to establish a 'meaning-making mechanism' (Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 202) to which they contribute. To reiterate an earlier point, there is no argument here that any set of questions such as those above could ever eliminate the possibility of researcher influence and control. However, the attempt here is for the researcher's voice to be different from, but not disrespectful of, that of the respondent (Chase, 2005) and the outcomes of this interviewing exercise, as discussed above, provide some proof that this has been the case. The table below indicates how responses were grouped in the sections that follow:

Figure 3. Categorisation of responses

Notions of professionalism: service and responsibility
The extent of professional autonomy and the relevance of measurable outcomes
The importance of headteachers and institutions in protecting a degree of autonomy
The primacy of results and their production
The centrality of observation, both external and internal
The prevailing sense of being able to offer something better
Other considerations: parents, media, bureaucracy

Two particular cases have also been included as 'a focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical or emblematic' of the study in question (Miles and Huberman, 1994:81).

8.2.1 Overview

They don't seem to trust that we can do the job, because they're constantly giving us more things that we have to meet to prove we can do the job. Danielle.

Notwithstanding Danielle's somewhat typical complaint about professional trust, all but one of the teachers interviewed expressed a broad degree of satisfaction with their professional lives. Given that 18 of the 22 respondents were engaged in Continuing Professional Development at Masters level, this positive outlook is probably unremarkable. Almost all responses seemed to be characterised by a cheerful resilience and a determination to do the best by students, often, in the view of those interviewed, in the face of some obstruction and discouragement from external organisations as well as demands from beyond the immediate school environment.

Respondents saw themselves charged with a position of social responsibility and an expectation from society to set an example. They felt themselves professionally autonomous, but only up to a point – and this autonomy was almost always contingent upon a concept of perfomativity. The culture of particular institutions and, above all, the outlook of headteachers and school leaders, emerged as very significant in terms of teachers' perception of their autonomy. The promulgation of results and data looms large in almost every interview, as does Ofsted - a body that most respondents would like to see abolished, along with league tables. Government interference was seen as unhelpful and invasive by most, but an irksome, if inevitable, part of normal life by some of those new to the profession. 14 of the 22 clearly expressed the idea of there being more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in 'this week's fad…or next term's fad' (Liam) or mused about 'an ideal world…where there's no more exams and you just teach and they're interested and engrossed' (Helen). All but one of the respondents were eager to speak at great length, providing numerous anecdotes and illuminating vignettes. An analysis of a random sample of 10 of the 50 interviews conducted in the study

as a whole reveals a ratio of 77:23 in terms of respondent/interviewer contribution.

8.2.2 Being a professional teacher: service and responsibility

Swann et al (2010:553) express the view that 'it is almost always external commentators who are proposing …new versions of teacher professionalism.' This may be true up to a point, for while the nuances of a debate that has exercised academics for the best part of six decades continues to rumble on, for the majority of these teachers their workaday view of themselves needs to go no further than traditionally accepted notions of competence ensured by examination and, above all, an orientation towards the public good (Millerson, 1964). This is not to belittle the importance of the concept for teachers, most of whom guard the notion of their professional status with some ferocity; it is, however, a reflection of the fact that the truths of teacher professionalism seem, particularly to this cohort of respondents, to be self-evident.

Only three respondents chose to mention the status of teachers comparative to other professions, with Jean invoking a time 'when my dad first started.' She has been told that a teacher was a highly 'respected member of society, whereas now, people don't seem to have that for teachers.' Given that, by default, this writer must have been teaching contemporaneously with Jean's dad, I would have to observe that one of our experiences may have been atypical.

Such responses to the question about perceptions of professionalism are very much in the minority, with 19 respondents – including Jean herself - referring to a concept of selfless service. This is captured through a proliferation of references to conducting oneself as a role model, adhering to accepted codes of conduct and the demonstration of duty and moral obligation, along with an overwhelming sense of responsibility towards those with whose progress, both academic and spiritual, they are entrusted.

The specific concept of acting as a role model is much stronger in younger teachers new to the profession, one of whom admits to falling foul of being unable to 'remain professional rather than their friend' and this being 'quite an issue' (Marsha). This is echoed in similar comments, predominantly from Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs), about the importance of maintaining distance, particularly from older students. In a significant adjunct to this, the three who do not mention anything specific about what could be termed as social responsibility, are more senior teachers whose responses locate their view of professionalism more firmly in the area of knowledge and expertise – acquiring and proudly sporting 'the mantle of the expert' (Steve). Along with this goes a strong sense of obligation towards others in the school; 'allowing teachers to be thinkers, to be reflectors; to give them space to think professionally' (Max).

There is a clear sense of accountability to students, parents, the institution and society in general. This is overt and specific in eight responses and touched upon passim in four others. For three respondents, this accountability is also related to a strong set of religious or spiritual beliefs.

8.2.3 Autonomous, trusted professionals – contingent upon outcomes.

When posing the question about autonomy, no specific definition or terms of reference were provided. Only one respondent asked for an explanation of the term. As a consequence, responses reflected teachers' own interpretation of the concept. Notwithstanding this, there is something of a commonality in their comments, based on notions of control over what they choose to do with their students on a day-to-day basis. Teachers in this study do not think that the strong sense of obligation and responsibility referred to in the section above is reflected in the degree of autonomy they experience. Christine's comment crystallises much of what respondents say in this regard:

How can you be autonomous? How can you be perceived as being good enough to be autonomous if every five minutes there's a new directive coming out?

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Nine respondents state clearly and unequivocally that they lack autonomy and, in all of these cases, statements attribute this deficit to the actions of organisations and bodies (Ofsted, QCA, 'the government') that exist beyond their immediate setting. Significantly, these nine respondents, along with four others, recognise that the actions of school leaders themselves are often constrained and dictated to by those same bodies. This is true, as well, of one school leader who was adamant about her own lack of autonomy.

8.2.4 'In my school' and 'because of my Head'

The most significant trend to emerge is reflective of Evetts' (2005) concept of organisational professionalism and consistent with Ball's (2008) concept of performativity. Seventeen respondents express the view that, within their particular setting, they enjoy a degree of autonomy contingent upon their producing outcomes – almost exclusively measured in terms of their students' academic success - that are acceptable within their institution. Typical of such widespread comments are those from Melissa, who in response to the question about whether she feels autonomous, talks in heavily conditional terms about how this happens 'in this school, to a certain extent, yes' and Kim who expresses the view that she, 'feel(s) quite lucky with my department' as she has 'schemes of work to follow but I can tailor them to my class.' Such instances of a restricted, if welcome, autonomy are common.

In an interesting aside, seven responses allude to things being worse in other schools, with Marsha speaking of 'other schools' that are 'very rigid about sticking to the framework' and Maria recalling 'previous experience where you…weren't sort of allowed to be innovative and creative.' Put together with the observations above relating to the conditionality of autonomy, along with comments about the enjoyment of even this limited autonomy bearing a degree of good fortune, it is clear that many of these teachers accept as normalised a situation where restrictions on their judgement applies as a matter of course.

Twelve respondents are clear in their view that the culture of the school affords them a degree of autonomy within frameworks that are proscribed with various degrees of rigidity. Seven responses identify the headteacher or other school leaders as centrally instrumental in allowing this autonomy. Such responses are most noticeable from teachers new to the profession and, as such, significant in terms of future policy and practice when it comes to consideration of the importance of school leaders.

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Case 1: Melissa, Martin and Robert – autonomous within their schools.

In terms of the protection afforded them by their senior leaders, these three respondents - all inexperienced but not all young – express similar views.

Melissa is an NQT in a village primary school. She is happy to be working in an environment where she feels valued and supported. Her interview recognises the need to 'tick the boxes' and acknowledges that, for all her overt support, the Headteacher experiences pressures and expectations that are tied in with her, Melissa's, performance. Nonetheless, it is this very support that Melissa values above all else, liberating her, as it does to 'create something that's completely mine, and a classroom that does things completely my way.' She talks of a broad ethos that gives direction and of 'every class (being) autonomous in its own little way.' When expressing concern that her class assessments may not be up to expectation she says that 'I was really panicking, and my Head Teacher said…well what did the parents say at the parents' evening, and they all went, my children are happy. They want to come to school. Thank you very much. And she said, well that's fine then.' On another occasion she makes a self-deprecating comment in public about the value of her opinion 'and the Deputy Head came to me the following day, and actually told me off, and said, don't you ever think that just because you're just the NQT your opinion isn't worth anything because it's worth a lot.'

Martin is in his second full year of teaching in a comprehensive school of some 1100 pupils and has just been appointed to a promoted post. He believes that 'you are dictated to a certain sense (sic) that you have to cover certain aspects, but I think the way in which you do that on the whole is up to you.' He is informed by a very strong sense of the importance of management, a concept to which he refers on numerous occasions, expressing unreserved satisfaction with his own experiences of such management, which acts, in his view, as a form of shield from outside influences. When discussing prospects for schools under a new government, he says that, 'I don't really see any changes. I think it's more, you know, it's more a management issue. Clearly things are changing, but if as a classroom teacher you're not really affected by those changes then I guess that's a testament to the management really.' Martin's sense of the importance of management is central to his thinking and when asked about potential enhancements to his professional autonomy – an issue that does not emerge as being of great importance to him - he says that, 'I don't believe it's the role of the teacher to consider everything that a child needs to be taught, you know. I don't think that's something that a teacher necessarily needs to do.' The notion of an overriding, if indistinct, authority seems to be firmly part of his professional consciousness. When put to him that further promotions may endow him with ultimate responsibility for his teaching, he replies that, 'I don't think that a move in to a leadership role means that you don't then need that direction from somewhere…just under the leadership…of a further reaching body…a higher power.'

Robert is an NQT in a city primary school. He feels confident and valued in a school where he completed most of his training and which pro-actively sought him out to appoint him. He accepts the constraints of outside bodies as a normalised aspect of his occupation and, like many respondents, his experience of class teaching is characterised by a recognition that 'you have the guide of the National Curriculum and, for example we were doing QCA (assessments) last week' but that 'to a certain extent you have control over the topics that you are given' and that 'you deliver it …the way you choose.' He appears to remain happily relaxed about the upshot of all of this because

'my Head can take all the grades, all the levelling' to analyse and act on accordingly. He feels trusted by the Head and Deputy 'and that probably…relieves a lot of the (pressure)' and while he doesn't see himself as the sort of person who 'has (sic) a fuss', he feels that much of his confidence stems from 'the school you're in and the staff you work with.'

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The importance of the particular institution and the senior people within it frame the experiences not just of these inexperienced teachers, but of the majority of this cohort. There is a strong feeling that a degree of freedom is afforded within schemes of work and established frameworks and that, subject to scrutiny from within the institution, teachers are able to follow their instincts and interests when deciding what is actually put on offer to children. Reference to the topical circumstances in which they may be able to exercise autonomy is made by every informant and, in almost all cases, is interpreted as being trusted to a degree within their particular setting.

8.2.5 Results: the bottom line

However, stronger still than this conditional feeling of well-being, is the view that the production of results lies at the basis of any such earned autonomy (Storey, 2009). Only five respondents feel free from the pressing requirement to generate good academic results, three of whom are cited above and the other two of whom are senior, very experienced teachers who, in an ironic twist worthy of a further study, express concern about the pressure under which they acknowledge many of their colleagues with less experience, and for whom they have an element of managerial responsibility, are operating because of this. The mistrust and scepticism surrounding the generation of academic results and their genuine value is widespread. Other than the self-esteem that it can endow on students, almost all respondents regard the discourse of the judgement of teachers or institutions through such results as unreliable and, occasionally, as we shall observe later, slightly dishonest.

There is an almost ubiquitous understanding of the harsh significance of the 'standards' agenda' in terms of their professional existence.

Results loom large in the comments of many respondents, in some cases dominating much of what they choose to speak about. Only one respondent chooses to locate the centrality of results within a broader political landscape; a senior teacher, he expresses the view on a number of occasions that even the 'bright, creative' teachers with whom he works are constrained and pushed towards conformity, a situation 'which I've not seen before and I just wonder if it's because of the economic climate, it's because of people worried about jobs, mortgages' (Shaun). Other than this piece of speculation, responses are limited to the expression of grievance about a hazard which is both organisational and occupational.

The pressure to demonstrate that pupils have made identifiable and, above all, measurable, progress is felt acutely by most respondents and seems to impinge starkly on their sense of professional autonomy. Not all are as apparently impassioned as Maurice who complains that 'in a way I'm a pupil again, because I've got to justify and I'm squirming in my chair there; why didn't this pupil make two sub-levels of progress.' Nonetheless, it is not necessary to delve far into most interview transcripts to find reference to disquiet about results and their importance. Helen talks of 'grades…pressure to get the grades to deliver, to be this outstanding school, it's a big pressure.' She goes on, in a passage about the tension between engaging students and the generation of data – a common quandary for many respondents – to capture a widespread view from other interviews:

> But it's the evidence, isn't it, you know? Kids enjoy my lessons. I know they do. But it's not that that people look at. It's your results, and that's what you've got you've got to deliver.

Her comments are echoed by Jackie who talks of the 'huff and puff and steam' of focussing on the improvement of a set of results for a particular year group to produce national test results 'when really it could have been better

directed' towards a group with greater needs. Shona, in what appears to be a particularly aggrieved set of responses, expresses the view that the drive for results 'actually puts (children) through the pressure for no other reason apart from the school wants to get a good rating or onto the league tables, I think.' Leanne explains that 'the pressure to get those results' dominates her particular school and that 'I'm not entirely sure we should be pushing some of our students in that way'; such practice has 'impacted my enjoyment of teaching' to the point where, in her 'darkest hours' she has contemplated leaving the profession. Comments about the negative impact of chasing results occur frequently in the responses of those seventeen respondents who question the centrality of quantifiable outcomes.

8.2.6 Generating the results: playing the game

All except two of the 22 respondents speak, often at some length, about the unwelcome pressure of producing specific test results as well as satisfying internal institutional mechanisms for tracking progress and achievement. Most of these responses embody, at the very least, some degree of scepticism about the intrinsic value of the process that engenders these results. Not everyone is as forthright as Liam, whose severe criticisms of the standards' agenda is captured in his comment that 'they don't trust me and I don't trust them' but there is an overwhelming feeling of resentment towards a system that compromises professionals to produce unreliable data. Harry speaks of perceived sophistry in the system, giving the example of a student who 'is able to draw the diagram' and 'that's Level 4; OK, I'll tick it.' Despite this, Harry remains entirely unconvinced that the student has grasped the fundamental concept, in this case (in a rather apt potential metaphor for this study) of the functioning of the human heart. Further such examples are common in the comments of respondents. In a startlingly extreme instance – although one which I have heard replicated in conversations with teachers beyond the remit of this piece of research – Maurice angrily relates how he works to ensure that a child reaches the school's set target of two sub-levels of progress and then 'I don't need to push him to make any further progress,

so I leave him alone because I've got to work on this other person who's made one sub-level.'

This functionality, and its implications for restricting autonomy, is captured in two further anecdotes. The first of these comes from Laura who is Head of Music in a thriving department in a large city secondary school that enjoys popularity within its largely well-to-do catchment area. Keen to defend her subject's status, Laura has to be responsive to parents who want their children 'to get exam results in their instrumental exams, because that goes towards UCAS points (required for university entrance) and gets them into top universities' but who do not see the need to be supportive of the ethos that she is attempting to build around the place of music in the school. At the same time, Laura has to manage a situation where school leaders want her to broaden access to the subject within the school without compromising the profile of results that go into the public domain. The conflict between Laura's clear and obvious love of her subject and the pressing need of parents and the school to produce results, causes her a degree of annoyance and distress that becomes visibly apparent during her interview.

In a further, somewhat apparently anguished, testimony to the triumph of summative results over quality of content, Shaun's comments are worth quoting at some length. A senior English teacher with a highly developed view of his own professional autonomy, much of his interview relates to the reductive effect of a system that demands quantifiable evidence, generated, in his view, through the promulgation of a curriculum where ease of measurement takes precedence over genuine understanding and learning. He cites the following example:

> We're doing a Year 7 test, and some staff are very happy with the Year 7 test, because it asks students to do three, five or seven techniques in persuasive language. So if you do three, you get a Level, if you do five you get a Level, if you do seven you get a Level. Now that is functional. That's functional … it's functional teaching. And staff like it because they can easily mark it and assess it, because they've done three, five or

seven. What it doesn't do, of course, is actually ask them to step away and say, is that any good as a piece of writing? Is it holistically persuasive? Does it really hit you? And it's that sort of functionality, I think, which has become so much the paradigm that actually when I start talking about that as perhaps not being the right way of doing it, I'm often faced from younger staff with blank…not always younger staff actually, but staff with blank faces, as though, what's the issue, you know. It's easy to mark, easy to teach, that's fine. Of course what that does is narrows down the whole nature of teaching, I think, and learning.

References to what McGivern (2007:1361) calls 'play(ing) tick-box games to give the impression of auditable practice' occur throughout the interviews. However, what is of prime significance here is not just the mechanisation and measurement of their practice which, to varying degrees, teachers see as something of an assault on their professional autonomy. The requirement to reduce all that is learnt to data that is conveniently measured rather than something that which can be judged for its intrinsic worth – often acknowledging a range of contexts – is just as great a cause for concern. In a telling example, Helen talks of how she captures the attention of her maths class by talking about code-breaking during the second World War 'which has nothing to do with the National Curriculum.' Sensing that she has won them over, she pursues the subject but then draws herself up sharply because 'that took up a lesson…I wasted a lesson, that's how it was at the end of the day. Oh my God, I've got to catch up. I've got to finish this chapter.'

8.2.7 Observations and their importance

Central to this anxiety about the production of auditable results, is the concomitant and pervasive concern about observation of practice. Teachers, particularly those new to the profession, regard observation of their practice as normal, but this does not mean that it is always welcome. All but two respondents mention Ofsted, unprompted by the interviewer, in their comments and not one reference is made in a vein that could potentially be deemed positive in any way. The only responses that are not exclusively

critical of the process are those of Liam who exhibits a degree of youthful defiance in his determination not to 'put on a show and display and a dance…for someone and then not have an accurate evaluation of my teaching' and, in a slightly different vein, Malcolm, the recipient of an outstanding judgement, who is adamant that 'I haven't done anything different, and if I (had) done something different, it would have gone wrong.' Even such marginally relaxed responses are uncommon.

More typical of reactions to Ofsted inspections, along with the impending arrival of inspection and its aftermath, is Kim's. Reproduced here, verbatim, from her interview transcript, are her comments when asked about those things that impact on her professional autonomy. Unprompted, she mentions Ofsted:

> I found….after the whole experience after they'd come in, I felt really deflated from it. I think it took me about four to six weeks until I felt happy again. We had them in for two days just after half term, so we had the October half term; then they came in on the Wednesday, Thursday. We got told on the Monday, and it was a real shock, coming back after half term and then they were coming in, so I'd prepared all my lessons and an inspector came and saw me with my top set Year 9 which I'm so thankful for. It could have been a much worse class. But then afterwards, after he saw me, I really felt proud of my lesson. I felt the kids, they were amazing. They really performed well, they were working really hard, but after the session when I saw him, he said that it was a good lesson, and I asked him how could it be outstanding? What would I need to do, and he said to me, oh that's not my job to tell you. And I just found that a really frustrating process, how, you know, he can sit at the back and he can judge me, but there's no thing about me to develop, there's nothing about…it seems to feel negative, what you haven't done, but in the sense of really broad criticisms, whereas nothing about, oh this was good but perhaps if you did this it would be outstanding, and it just…it just felt really negative and then at the end of the whole Ofsted inspection, we could only get a satisfactory anyway,

because of the exam results. So that was a really…I just found the whole experience, if they could only give us satisfactory anyway, what was the point of them coming in? It just felt quite a frustrating process and, yeah, I did feel a bit deflated after that and a bit annoyed. And I don't think it was until I came back after Christmas that I actually started enjoying teaching again.

Kim's experience is typical of much of the general complaint about the process from many respondents, with the frustration being embodied in comments about rigidly applied criteria, an unwillingness to contextualise either the institution or, more pertinently, the nature and composition of particular groups of students. The high-stakes nature of the exercise, along with the discomfiting atmosphere created by impending visits, whether imminent or in the more distant future, also enhances this anxiety. Significantly, in relation to earlier comments about the primacy of test results and about institutions offering a degree of protection to some professionals, only two respondents expressed the view that Ofsted was used as managerial control over them. One can only speculate in these instances that, after all, it is the most senior members of a school who have the most to lose from this particular organisation and may, therefore, be reluctant to raise the spectre that haunts them as much as it does their staff.

Further to comments about official observation by an outside body, seven respondents mention the institution's own regime of observation as inducing greater stress and uncertainty than that of Ofsted, which, to a certain, extent could be catered for as a set piece event. And in an extrapolation of this particular finding, impromptu observations or 'learning walk' visits, where obvious spot-checks are carried out to inspect the implementation of in-house policy, are seen as more unnerving still. Christine, a senior teacher, expresses anger and disappointment about 'some stunning teachers who go to pieces at the thought of having a lesson observation, because the judgement, the criteria….(don't) …allow for the creativity in their lesson.' In an interview during which she seems to become visibly angry and upset about the outcome of a colleague's observation, Jackie talks of how 'it really

crushed' this colleague and how she 'feels rubbish' as a consequence. Leanne, talking of the internal checking regimes complains that 'those sort of pop-in monitorings that (are) unannounced, I would say that they are the ones that for me, break that trust.' Shona echoes this dissatisfaction, bemoaning 'surprise visits into classrooms 'that 'add extra pressure' and which can 'almost at times make you doubt yourself as a professional.'

It is worth reiterating that neither Ofsted nor in-house observation were specifically mentioned in the framing of the interview prompt about trust or external pressures, but that twelve respondents chose to speak about them at some length – and of Ofsted in particular - as the mechanism that infracted the trust that they felt should have been afforded them.

8.2.8 There must be more to it than this: a sense of something better

Liam, newly qualified, laments the fact that there must be more to teaching mathematics than what he finds himself doing:

> And I'm just going over the same things again because of this shallow teaching….I say shallow mainly in terms of the actual practice (and) it just doesn't seem to stick in people's heads.

This sense of something better is sometimes articulated clearly and precisely, such as Helen's wish to carry on the decoding exercise mentioned above or Jackie expressing disappointment that she has been unable to somehow shoehorn her own interest in the Hadron Collider into her lessons. Many other examples exist and for almost all respondents, notwithstanding their general optimism and determination to succeed, there is a prevailing sense of there being something better that they can offer their students. Many bemoan the lack of excitement in some of their lessons as they sacrifice innovation for measurable outcomes. Leanne captures this in her concessionary comment that 'obviously they (school leaders) need the grades' but goes on to explain that 'we're not fostering the skills and the love' for subject matter or learning. An exploration of this sense of being able to offer more is developed in

greater detail in the following chapter that deals with the second round of interviews.

Before drawing some conclusions about those elements that teachers believe are instrumental in inhibiting their autonomy, it is worth looking at the case of Max, a senior teacher in a school earmarked for closure because of a local authority reorganisation.

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Case 2: Max's closing school. 'Let's go out and do what we think is right.'

Max's school was earmarked for closure in 2012 as part of a local authority restructuring, tied in with the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) initiative in 2008. The school had not been identified as being deficient in performance in any way and was in no greater state of physical disrepair than others in the area. Examination results were comparable with similar schools and the school itself enjoyed a good reputation in the town. The closure announcement was seen as both unfair and arbitrary by teachers. As student numbers diminished with no recruitment into Year 7 in 2009, Max and senior leaders began to see opportunities in this adversity, enhanced, as he readily recognises, by a spirit of bloody-mindedness born of their perceived unfair treatment. Principally, Max sees the driving force here as 'the investment we've put into morale, into giving teachers the autonomy, the empowering of people and the whole thing.'

He sees the manifestation of this empowerment in enabling teachers to follow their instincts and, as the title of this passage suggests, to 'do what we think is right.' In a telling passage he talks of the unexpected benefit of facing closure, describing a situation where the relaxation of the usual paraphernalia of control and auditability is a precursor to greater autonomy:

> It is weird, it is perverse, it's very strange. But suddenly, because we're closing, a whole black cloud…and the black cloud would be pressures.

> The pressures, the professional pressures we were under, suddenly a black cloud has been lifted in a sense, in that we can take more risks, and in that we can have …professionals can take more of…yeah, more chances, you know, more scope, because, OK, the big pressure is the standards one, the big stick is Ofsted, and that's been taken away

In a development that would resonate with those respondents who believe that a more liberated approach would have no effect on test results other than, perhaps, to enhance them, such test results in the school have improved and Max is unequivocal in drawing a correspondence between such improvement and the lifting of the 'black cloud.'

In a rather sour footnote, the projected BSF project, of which the closure of the school was a part, was withdrawn in the announcement of July, 2010 some three weeks after the interview with Max.

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Notwithstanding the singular circumstances of Max's closing school, much of what he talks about builds a bridge between the concept of the pursuit of results and the sense of better alternatives that come from the comments of many respondents. Moreover, both in the comments above, and elsewhere in the interview, mention is made of the full range of pressures that, with two exceptions, all respondents cite between them. The following sections deal with these other pressures.

8.2.9 The role of 'the government'.

In conjunction with the concept of organisational autonomy, respondents have a sense that it is 'the government' that drives the need to generate results and data and that even the worst manifestations of institutional regulation and control are, of themselves, reactions to this. Leanne, working in a challenging school, states that 'I could pinpoint the moment when I really started to feel enormously pressured (as being) when the government said you must get

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thirty percent with maths and English'. Twelve other responses, some equally impassioned, cite government interference as the root of the problem, with fourteen identifying the production and generation of results as being the greatest challenge to their professional autonomy. The abolition of Ofsted (nine) and of league tables (seven) emerge as the two main improvements that respondents would wish to see.

In terms of government interference, there are only the most oblique and infrequent of references to party political positions and no sense of responses being driven by political affiliation; it is just 'the government' intervening in an unhelpful way. Similarly, although four responses mention, unprompted, the intention of the May 2010 coalition government's vigorous attempt to promote academy schools - with three of these appearing to be somewhat scornful and the other, stemming from an informant already working in an academy, being wearily resigned – there is nothing that could be characterised as a politicised view behind such observations. More prevalent is a feeling that hard times were ahead and that worse was still to come in terms of cuts in spending. However, even such general observations were not couched in party political terms. Melissa's comment that 'I'm assuming it's the government (who) want to see what these children are doing' is somewhat typical of responses that express a resigned tolerance to the intervention of a disembodied and distant authority that has the power to make an impact on their working lives. Christine expresses the view that 'if anywhere needed meddling with it was the banks'; Danielle voices the concern that 'it seems that they're all very much about running it as a business' and, as we have seen above Shaun, uniquely among respondents, draws a correspondence between prevailing economic conditions and a submissive compliance that erodes teacher autonomy. Other than these examples, there are no specific references to a broader political landscape, with observations perhaps being encapsulated in Harry asking, 'can we please keep politics out of education? Politics has to do with other things'.

Throughout the interviews there is a strong sense of 'stuff trickling down' (Jackie) from above and being filtered through school management systems,

with many respondents acknowledging that this has an impact on the actions and conduct of such managers. Teachers recognise the apparatus of the drive for quantifiable results which, in their turn, are placed in the public domain, along with an inspection regime, both formal and informal, that regulates and restricts them. And while there is a strong sense of resentment at being 'done to' in this way, there is no corresponding broader analysis of the forces at work upon them. Policy appears to be policy and although this may have been framed by those removed from the action and although, principally in the form of league tables and Ofsted inspections, teachers would like to see this apparatus dismantled, their reactions are reflective of something between Evetts' (2005) conception of occupational professionalism and Storey's notion (2009) of an earned autonomy, underpinned, as ever, by the prevailing notion of performativity (Ball, 2008).

8.2.10 Other pressures (and non-pressures): parents, the media and bureaucracy

Recognition of the importance of the standards' agenda is at the forefront of many of the responses about autonomy. One corollary of the prevalence of this discourse is the way in which this agenda is part of public debate. Five respondents mention parental expectations of results as being an unwelcome pressure with Laura's comments about music education above, alluding to the commodification of the educational process, being typical of these. Along with this go three responses bemoaning the media's annual interest and comment about national examination results. No respondents mention these elements as having an immediate or explicit effect on their autonomy in terms of their daily dealings with colleagues or students, but some acknowledge it as a factor that contributes to their general perception of themselves as trusted professionals.

Perhaps surprisingly, given its widespread status as the curse of modern times, bureaucracy, worthy as far back as 1986 (York and Henry) of the damning epithet of 'perhaps the most maligned word in modern human service dialogue', is not deemed to infract teachers' autonomy, with only three

respondents mentioning the term. Speculation about the absence of the term per se is of interest and, in the view of this writer, accounted for by the fact that the lived experience of teachers in terms of generating, tabulating and analysing outcomes – and lamented in many of these interviews – is seen, somehow, as separate from a notion of bureaucracy located in generic paper shuffling and pen pushing. Although not the central focus of this study, bureaucratic practices that impact upon other aspects of teacher duties – the logging of behaviour incidents, planning for journeys, the production of multiple copies of plans – often elicit discontent in conversations with teachers. The significance of these differing concepts of bureaucracy become clear when we look at the terminology and the rationale behind the rhetoric of 'freeing up' of policy makers. Although dealt with at some length in detail later in this chapter, it is interesting to look at one of the early statements of the May 2010 government. Some two weeks into office, Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, in promoting the appeal of academy status for schools, announced that:

> The majority of teachers that I have talked to want to have less bureaucracy and what we are doing today is inviting teachers to go down this route – I am not forcing anyone to do anything. I am saying to teachers and to heads: "If you think that there is too much bureaucracy, if you want to get on with the job, if you want to spend more time teaching, and less time form-filling, then take this opportunity." (*The Guardian*, May, 2010)

This apparently sympathetic stance does not correspond to teachers' principal concerns. It is not 'form-filling' that particularly irritates this cohort, although the physical collation of results and data are alluded to occasionally. The desire to 'get on with job' is more to do with the fundamental autonomy of choosing what to teach and then teaching it without a persistent threat posed by audit and regulation – both formal and informal.

8.3   Initial conclusions and further investigation.

This chapter has demonstrated that teachers locate their professionalism within a concept of service and obligation. Although not the focus of this study, few evince anxiety about outside perceptions of this professional status. In terms of professional autonomy, Dale's (1989) characterisation of the move from to licence to regulation is central to their perception of themselves as being autonomous *up to a point*. However, Hoyle and John's (1995:80) hope that:

> it will be the outcome of the efforts of the organised teaching profession, not necessarily to shape the goals of education, but to ensure that the goals established by the government do not greatly reduce the autonomy of the individual teacher

bears the hallmark of commentary written before the normalisation of a standards' agenda that had become hegemonic – and in a volume that has one brief reference to Ofsted in 160 pages. This is significant because of the prominent position of this organisation and its importance in the consciousness of teachers in 2010/11. The substantial commentary by respondents about observation and scrutiny demonstrates that such overt regulation and supervision sit uneasily with a vision of teachers being prepared to effectively challenge such governmental goals. Nonetheless, Hoyle and John are entirely correct in their assessment of the fact that the shaping of the goals of education are far removed from either the ambition of most – but not all – teachers or the opportunity afforded them to do so.

In terms of what this first round of interviews reveals, Braverman's (1974) formulation of choosing from limited and fixed alternatives is pertinent. The firmly held view of those respondents who believe that within their own setting, and supported by their own school leaders, they enjoy a degree of earned autonomy is clearly expressed. Of the cohort, five (of whom three are described in *Case 1* above) feel entirely trusted and protected within their immediate environment. Many refer to the way in which the day-to-day interpretation of curricular demands can be left to themselves and none question the necessity for the institution of generating results that children,

parents and, indeed, wider society, deem to be the quality tags of achievement. Despite this, however, such autonomy as they enjoy exists within circumstances that are institutionally inimical to the interrogation of any wider, alternative view of the purposes of education.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that so many respondents refer so frequently to results. The generation of such results and measurable outcomes is of great significance to this cohort and is a factor that is ubiquitous in their consideration of the level of their professional autonomy. There is suspicion about the value and credibility of some of these results and how they are achieved but notwithstanding any reservations felt, the production of such outcomes is accepted as normalised practice. Despite this, as the second round of interviews reveals, teachers have definitely not lost sight of possibilities and potential in terms of better curricular offers.

These teachers' mistrust of government – for some, a rather indistinct entity - during this period is enhanced by anxiety about what was to come, and this is borne out significantly in the period following the general election in the UK which is charted below. They have a strong feeling that they could offer students more but that, by doing so, they could infract the expectations of their institutions and, possibly, stall the production of acceptable test results.

As a consequence of these findings from the first round of interviews, and following a section that looks at the political background to the interviews themselves, the study moves on to examine:

- The cohort's reflections on the coalition government's promise of greater autonomy
- Further reflections about regulation and observation
- A further investigation into how teachers themselves would wish to exercise greater autonomy.
- An exploration of the concept of teachers being able to offer more to their students than they do under current conditions.

8.4 The political background to the interviews: what was taking place in England when the interviews were conducted.

This section places the interviews in their social and political context. It is an attempt to make available 'the situations and contexts to which...subjects refer' (Siverman, 2006:45), acknowledging a degree of topicality that could have influenced responses. Further to this, Kincheloe and McLaren (2000:281) when writing about the critical social approach to research, remind us that this method

> is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social realism

While it is true that not all of the factors identified by these authors are immediately significant for the respondents in the current study, an approach that disaggregates the responses of teachers in the early summer of 2010 from social and political developments that were inescapable would seem to be deficient.

The following section looks at events immediately following the May General Election and then moves to the autumn period when the White Paper (Department for Education, 2010f) was published.

8.4.1 Late spring in England, 2011. The aftermath of the General Election

The first round of interviews occurred against political developments that dominated public debate and discussion. The General Election in the UK of May 5th 2010 had taken place against the crisis of the world banking system which, in turn, had the effect of normalising the argument that whoever took office following the election would inherit economic mayhem – and that the logical consequence of this would be an attack on public service. The

formation of the coalition government provided added drama and spectacle to this discourse both domestically and internationally. I observed the negotiations around the forming of the coalition through the lens of CNN's China service and watched the installation of the new Prime Minister on a TV screen on the Shanghai metro. The impact was truly international, albeit that the implications for the respondents in my cohort were immediate and local. Given that one of the fundamental precepts of this study is that it is an exploration of teacher autonomy within the context of the political, social and economic conditions of the time, it would be unconscionable to ignore such events. For this reason, it is worth charting some of the developments that provided the background to these first interviews in May and June, 2010.

Within days of the election, the government education websites used by teachers bore banner messages declaring that a new government had been elected and that the policy on those sites may no longer be current. Homepages of these sites were blanked out while a pop-up message against a black background announced this. Michael Gove became the new Secretary of State for Education, having previously established a position on school reform that had been formulated around the rhetoric of 'freedom' for schools and teachers, promising that a new government would 'give you the freedom to teach how you want to' (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2010). A brief resumé of the developments that followed serves to capture the sense of urgency of the new government's plans and the inevitability of yet more change – a development most teachers recognised in the subsequent interviews. An examination of the notion of 'freedom' is also illuminating here.

On 25th May, some two weeks after the installation of the new government, a new parliament was opened with the Queen's Speech. In this brief statement of intent, Gove's interpretation of freedom becomes clearer.

> Legislation will be introduced to enable more schools to achieve academy status, giving teachers greater freedom over the curriculum and allow new providers to run state schools. (Number 10, 2010)

On the day after the Queen's Speech, a press statement on the newly formed Department for Education (DfE) site, listed the freedoms that schools would now enjoy. These were then embedded in a letter sent on that same day to schools deemed by Ofsted to be outstanding and, as such, suitable to apply for immediate academy status with effect from September, 2010. It is worth reproducing that list below in order to demonstrate their limited nature. These freedoms, with the exception of exemption from national pay and conditions, represented only minor departures from those that existed in previous legislation. None seem to relate to a 'freedom to teach how you want to' but more to a freedom to adapt managerial and organisational procedures that would exert as great a control over teachers as had ever existed up to this point.

- Freedom from local authority control
- Ability to set your own pay and conditions for staff
- Freedom from following the national curriculum
- Ability to change the length of terms and school days
- Having greater control over school budgets
- Freedom to spend the money the local authority currently spends on your behalf

(Department for Education, 2010a)

The coalition government published its 17 point plan for schools the next day, 26th May, in which it reasserted a commitment to 'target inspection on areas of failure', 'publish performance data on educational providers' and 'external assessment' along with league tables, albeit that the latter would be subject to 'reform' (The Coalition, 2010). The limited extent of any such reform was made clear in a statement posted on the DfE website eleven days later on June 7th (Department for Education, 2010b) and encapsulated in the two lengthy, but pertinent, quotations that follow. In the first, apparently innocuous, common-sense statement, reference is made to 'a relentless focus on the basics' as if such a comment were unproblematic and beyond question.

> Ministers are committed to giving schools more freedom from unnecessary prescription and bureaucracy. They have always made clear their intentions to make changes to the National Curriculum that will ensure a relentless focus on the basics and give teachers more flexibility than the proposed new primary curriculum offered.

A potential paradox emerges here – and one that respondents in later interviews are very keen to explore: against rhetoric of non-interference, the incoming government summarily relinquishes parts of the National Diploma (Department for Children, School and Families, 2009b) and the Rose Review of primary education (Department for Children, School and Families, 2009a) to 'ensure a relentless focus on basics', the nature of which are not defined but which appear to be a reflection of the hegemonic position of a concentration on numeracy and literacy.

The second quotation from the same source brings into question any commitment to the reform of league tables and testing hinted at in the new government's own 17 point statement published twelve days earlier:

> Key Stage 2 results are a robust and consistent source of information for parents at a crucial transition point for their child as they move on to secondary school. Tests at 11 mark the end of primary school for each pupil, and it is right that we have a consistent and externally validated view of individual pupils' progress at that time.(DfE, 2010b)

The discourse about freedom promoted by the new government appears to be fundamentally about structural, procedural and operational changes, all of which are consistent with a neo-liberal agenda of privatisation, continuing regulation and scrutiny, alongside the reduction of public spending. None of the measures announced between May 9th, eight days before the interviewing process for this study began, and July 9th when they finished, relate to Gove's promise to allow teachers 'the freedom to teach how you want to.'

In a further development, the Academies Bill, published on May 26th, progressed though three committee stages in four working days – a schedule unprecedented in parliament except in times of national emergency - between July 21st and 26th with the intent of enabling schools to become academies by September 1st (Parliament, 2010). Alongside this, in a well publicised move at the time, Gove had written to his predecessor as Secretary of State on June 7th (Department for Education, 2010c) reinforcing the need for cuts, although this was removed from the website following the government's emergency budget of June 22nd. On July 5th the government announced a significant reduction in the previous administration's Building Schools for the Future programme (Department for Education, 2010d) and in an error which was not later acknowledged on its website, misinformed some 25 schools who were erroneously told that their projects would go ahead, impacting, incidentally, on one of the respondents in the interview cohort (see Case 2 above).

Alongside this discourse about the inevitability of cuts and the need for liberation from bureaucratic control, the discussion of freedom took a slightly different turn. The school's minister, Nick Gibb, began to foreground the need to give teachers the freedom to discipline unruly pupils (Vasagar, 2010). The discussion of another freedom, that to sack failing teachers, was also prominent (Panorama, 2010) and in an echo of Tony Blair's earlier decision to choose a school for his children some three boroughs away from his London home, the new Prime Minister alluded to the lack of freedom of choice for parents through his admission of being 'terrified' about the prospect of not 'finding a good secondary school' (Shepherd, 2010) in London.

Of the respondents in the interview sample, one was already working in an academy – although leaving because of dissatisfaction with its demands – another was working in a school that had expressed an interest in becoming one, and one in a school where trade union activists had made it demonstrably clear that they would oppose any such move. Almost all respondents commented about the impact of living through this period of flux and uncertainty either in their interview responses or in casual conversation

before or afterwards. Almost all left for their summer break in the knowledge that at least one school in their immediate geographical area had expressed an interest in changing its status in the coming year.

It is also worth noting that talk of cuts and changes were definitely not limited to education and that teachers watching and reading the news in general could not have evaded a discourse about spending on public service that verged, occasionally, on the apocalyptic.

8.4.2 Autumn, 2010 in England and the publication of the White Paper and the reaction of respondents

In November, 2010 the coalition government published the White Paper – *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010f) . On the day of its release a copy of the introductory speech in the House of Commons (DfE, 2010g) was sent by me to all respondents at a time when the second round of interviews was taking place. The text of the speech itself is divided into seven unequal sections summarised in the following way:

- Strengths to build on – acknowledging the work of 'so many superb teachers' - 4 lines
- Keeping up with the best – an expression of concern about international comparison of achievement – 17 lines
- The importance of teaching – proposals to improve teacher training – 10 lines
- Discipline and behaviour – expressing the need to maintain order in schools - 14 lines
- Raising standards for all – a section that contains a mixture of suggestions for curriculum changes and proposed intervention in schools failing to reach 'minimum standards' – 25 lines
- A strong strategic role for local authorities – talks of local authorities being 'indispensable partners' whilst gradually 'stepping back' from school management – 10 lines

- The fierce urgency of the need for reform – a section that talks of the previous government allowing reform to go 'into reverse' with schools losing freedom and the curriculum losing 'rigour' – 10 lines

Over the next two months, which included the winter vacation period, 11 respondents sent 15 separate email responses to this speech and to one other subsequent interview given by Gove (Today, 2011) and sent to them by me in January, 2011. These responses were entirely separate from those elicited during the interviews in October – December 2010.

Responses were largely negative in relation to Gove's proposals as the following section will demonstrate, with only one set of entirely positive comments and one that could be said to be broadly neutral. The sense of mistrust that is prevalent in the second round of interviews is just as evident here, as is a realisation that there is a paradoxical mismatch between rhetoric about freedom and continuing regulation.

The overwhelmingly positive response comes from Liam and this is based almost entirely on the importance of enforcing classroom discipline – something that also clearly emerges as a significant issue for him in his interviews. Elsewhere, with one exception, the proposals for enhancing discipline, including one to enlist former military personnel as teachers, elicits the greatest number of specific responses and is treated with scepticism, ridicule and anger. Christine is particularly enraged as a school leader, deprecating 'the assumption that leaders in education are not natural leaders since clearly we need the military to show us how to do it.' In less irate responses, Danielle expresses concern about 'polarisation of behaviours', the approach to which she believes needs to be rather more nuanced that an imposition of firm discipline. Laura, while stating that teaching should attempt to encourage people from a range of backgrounds, considers it 'naïve that it will cure all behavioural problems in the classroom overnight and…adequate training is key to ensure a successful transfer of skills.' Laura goes on to express her concern that this emphasis on stark discipline exposes the fact that 'politicians do not truly understand the diversity of children and their

educational needs' and this is echoed by Jackie's pondering about 'what statement this makes about how the Government sees a modern classroom.' Older heads such as Max and Shaun are more summarily dismissive, respectively calling the proposals 'horrendous' and 'based on ignorance.'

Beyond the issue of discipline, which remains something of a perennial lightning-rod for teachers, the media and the general public, the responses reflect a mistrust which is amplified in the second round of interviews. This resides principally in the new government's continuing commitment to a regime of central control and regulation and is poorly received when expressed in the language of 'freedom'. Maurice points out that:

> They say that they will be slimming down the curriculum but at the same time they state (they will be) simply specifying the core knowledge in strategic subjects which every child should know at each key stage which infers (sic) that it will be prescriptive. This is a contradiction to …(giving)… teachers more freedom to innovate and inspire.

The identification of this apparent mismatch is referred to specifically in five of the first set of eleven responses. Jean expresses her concern that 'slimming down the curriculum sounds brilliant until you realise he's expecting all children to reach a certain level by the end of (various Key Stages).' Maria expresses unhappiness with the prescription of subjects for the new English Baccalaureate and Christine observes that 'it's all about deconstructing everything that went before and returning to a 'system' we grew past a very long time ago.' In a significant aside, the suggestion that the proposals are a reflection of a distant golden age enjoyed by Gove and his contemporaries and, as such, somewhat out of touch with contemporary schools, is present in ten of the fifteen responses. Marsha is particularly outraged by an insistence on the retention of facts, asserting that 'we need to guide children to think and make sensible choices (about sustainability) rather than get swamped with facts about Winston Churchill.'

Other disparate criticisms reinforce this sense of mistrust. The retention of, and commitment to, league tables; a concern about the pedagogical implications of on-the-job training for teachers; a misunderstanding of the complexity of children's needs and how they learn; a suspicion that the drive towards academy status is a principal force at work in these reforms and a sense of frustration that, despite the four lines at the start of Gove's speech, there is no recognition that if so many professionals are, indeed, 'superb' why, then, it is that they need so much further regulation and instruction? Much of this frustration is borne out and articulated in the interviews that either followed or were contemporaneous.

8.5   Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the data from the first round of interviews with teachers, identifying a set of interests and preoccupations in relation to their view of professional autonomy. It has placed these within the context of prevailing social and economic conditions. It is clear that where these teachers acknowledge a degree of professional autonomy it remains entirely contingent upon operating within the parameters of a wider systems of control. The next chapter goes on to investigate ways in which these teachers believe they could potentially exercise a greater degree of autonomy and whether the promise of greater freedom from a new government could assist them in achieving this.

Chapter 9

The second round of teacher interviews: two levels of progress or trapped Chilean miners?

The previous chapter captured the initial thoughts of teachers about their professional autonomy and finished by contextualising these observations within a particular time and place in terms of social and political developments. This section reports on, and analyses, the second round of interviews separately from the first. This has been done for a number of reasons, all of which, in keeping with a critical approach, are reflective of a significant change in social conditions. The importance and impact of the General Election in the UK in May, 2010 has been dealt with above: teachers recognised the significance of this for their professional, personal and civic lives. Shortly after their return to a new school year in September – another relevant break from the interviews conducted during the election era – the coalition government publicly announced its intentions and then published the White Paper (DfE, 2010f). Further to these considerations of the social and political conditions, the themes and ideas that emerged from the first interviews are expanded upon and developed here, with particular regard to reactions to the new administration, along with an examination of there being 'something better' that truly autonomous teachers could offer.

9.1   The interview cohort

Of the original 22 respondents, all took part in the second round of interviews. Three had moved from their original school setting; one to a different school, one to work as a supply teacher on a regular basis and another to work on an educational project based outside a traditional school setting. All remained, therefore, interested parties in the education of young people.

All respondents had been furnished with the full transcript of their first interview along with the corresponding sound file. All but one had found it intolerable to listen to the sound of his or her own voice, but most had read the transcript with some interest, with only two respondents apologising for

not having properly looked at it. Immediate email responses were confined to a few points of clarification or verbal expression with no engagement with the views expressed or a wish to expand upon these. However, when subsequently interviewed, in a gratifying development, eight respondents made clear and unequivocal comments about the fact that reading the transcript had been of great use to them in their reflections about their professional practice. Further to this, nine respondents commented on the fact that they had specifically reflected on the concept of professional autonomy and what they understood by it since the interview. In all, 14 interviewees stated explicitly that they stood by what they had said and had no desire to change it. There were no instances of interviewees wishing to retract anything they had said. Such comments and observations are of significance in terms of emphasising the collaborative, collegiate nature of the study (see Chapter 7) and, as such, reinforce the strength of its ethical base.

The following section begins with an overview of the main findings of this round of interviews and then goes on to look in greater detail at the main areas of interest to emerge from them. When making final arrangements for the second interview, respondents were sent a sound file of an interview given by Michael Gove, relating very specifically to teacher autonomy (Today, 2010). All but one confirmed that they had listened to all or part of this prior to the second interview.

The prompts for these second interviews were as follows:

1. *Having read your transcript and/or listened to the sound file, is there anything you want to add or any amendment you wish to make?*
2. *Having listened to the interview with Michael Gove, what is your reaction to what he has to say?*
3. *Do you feel that your professional autonomy will be enhanced by these proposals?*
4. *In what circumstances and in what ways do you think you could enhance your professional autonomy?*

All four of these areas represent extrapolations on the main themes to emerge from the initial interviews or to developments in the wider world since that time. Reactions and comments in this second round of interviews were less uniform than in the first with conversations taking a number of unpredictable or individualistic turns. However, overall analysis of these interviews showed a clear connection to the themes identified in the first interview and an obvious willingness to return to and expand upon these – along with a similar willingness to discuss prospects for professional autonomy, particularly in relation to what had been announced by the new government. As a consequence, this section reports on the responses in the following way:

1. The mistrust of the new coalition government and its plans for education.
2. An examination of the paradoxical situation where regulation is coupled with the rhetoric of 'freedom.' The centrality of results is restated here.
3. The unrelenting regime of scrutiny and regulation that impacts upon teachers' actions.
4. An examination of a strong sense of there being something beyond the current systems that teachers feel could render them genuinely autonomous.

9.2   Overview

…you know, we can't have every educational experience that we have with children always about meeting an objective, because sometimes you don't meet that objective, but that's not the end of the world. Other times, you might completely abandon that objective and something else will have been learned during the lesson, but that system doesn't allow for that. That system says, this is what will be learned at the beginning, you know, I mean…that's not the way people learn, is it? (Steve)

Steve's comments capture much of the air of frustration among respondents that is characteristic of this particular round of interviews. The continuing prevalence of the drive to produce measurable outcomes that satisfy a

setting's need for audit was mentioned by all but one respondent. In many cases this constituted a significant section of the response and, as in the previous round of interviews, the extent to which the drive for results affects daily teaching and learning remains great. The interviews revealed a deep sense of mistrust at worst, and unease at best, about the coalition government's plans for change and reform: all but 5 responses touched upon this, with 16 of the 22 pointing to the paradoxical situation of a set of reforms that promise freedom but maintain a framework of overall control. All but three responses talked of a sense of being restrained and restricted by the demands of an assessment-led curriculum, with numerous anecdotes – some reproduced below – about warily treading away from the accepted and pre-determined curriculum path. In a rather charming aside, three respondents invoke the spirit of the 1989 film, *Dead Poets' Society*. The sense of a degree of occupational autonomy – enjoying some earned autonomy in one's own setting – remained strong, but four respondents were very clear in their view that the autonomy being proposed by the government was autonomy to govern, manage and control and not to allow genuine freedom of choice in classrooms. Balanced against this, as a minority viewpoint, were four different responses that were happy to hand operational decisions to others: 'you know, we're only producing… what's required of us, I think' (Martin). A framework of observation and inspection, particularly in the form of Ofsted, is mentioned in half of the responses and remains an important and influential component of these teachers' professional lives.

9.3 Mistrust of the new government, its announcements and its published plans.

This section looks at the low level of trust expressed towards the coalition government and then goes on to link this to the paradox, as most respondents see it, of a rhetoric of freedom against a background of regulation.

The starting point for the second set of interviews was discussion about the recorded interview sent to respondents in which the new Secretary of State for Education explained his view of the importance of teacher autonomy

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(Today, 2010). Although 17 responses articulated a clear mistrust of the new government and its initial pronouncements, there were no indications that any such criticisms were rooted in party political allegiance. Max declares that he is 'deeply worried about the Gove regime' expressing a concern that 'it will do untold damage (and) undo all the things we've tried to do in education for the last however many years' and Steve expresses doubt that 'Michael Gove actually has any handle on what a school is.' However, apart from these two specific references to the newly installed Secretary of State for Education, no other responses actually mention any politicians by name and none refer to political parties or articulate any allegiance. The mistrust of politicians is generic and Leanne's complaint that she doesn't 'trust any government' is echoed in many of these responses.

Many comments refer to a set of policies that these respondents see as unappreciative of their daily lives and which do not recognise the complexity of what they do or the understanding that they bring to it. Danielle captures this sentiment when she talks of policies that are framed with what she sees as notional children and settings in mind, whereas she and her colleagues are 'faced with grumpy teenagers' where it becomes essential to 'trust our own professional discretion' but that 'they (government) still don't trust us to do that as teachers.' Maurice is adamant that he is 'not going to be listening to any more governments because they don't know what they're talking about' and Jean's complaint that 'they don't trust us at the end of the day, do they?' is followed by the terse observation that 'otherwise they'd have teachers in the government.' Kim is sharply forthright when asked about what the government is proposing, acknowledging that 'it sounds wonderful' but expresses complete disbelief in any commitment to teacher autonomy and Dianne dismissively suggests that 'they're trying to make sound-bites because they need to come in and sweep clean.' These responses speak of a cohort which demonstrates a disbelief about a discourse of 'freedom to teach' that is at variance with their daily experience.

Criticisms of Gove's notion of autonomy go further than this, with some respondents identifying autonomy to manage, as opposed to 'freedom to

teach', being at the centre of the new government's plans. Jackie had assiduously followed national developments about plans for the establishment of new academy schools and different overall provision and draws the conclusion that she 'couldn't see anything that laid out in black and white what I, as a teacher, would have more choice over if I was in one of these schools than the other (sic).' Harry reinforces this point when he observes that the new Secretary of State 'is proposing … autonomous and free school(s) but he is not proposing … autonomous and free teaching in the classroom.' Christine and Max, both senior leaders, express anger about talk of freedom, with the latter being particularly vehement in his criticism:

> I don't think he (Gove) understands the word autonomy; I don't think he understands what he's talking about in that sense. I think autonomy…when I hear the word autonomy, my understanding is, teachers who are empowered to do the job they see fit best, and they have the skills to do it. I think that the system he's thinking of is not that. And I worry for the future. I really do.

It is Christine's comment that 'you are only allowed to do what you're allowed to do by the political agenda….and the direction which the government decides schools need to go or education needs to go' that leads neatly into the next significant part of this analysis. Underpinning all of the scepticism and disbelief that characterises so many of these responses is an identification, often clearly articulated, that there is an inconsistency between rhetoric that talks of freedom and autonomy and the prevalent discourse within schools which remains one of performativity, audit and scrutiny – with these latter elements endowed with great importance because they are bound up with institutional and personal success or recognition.

9.4   The central paradox: free but controlled.

At the end of a heavily sarcastic reaction to the idea that he is being offered freedom to set his own direction, Shaun's comment typifies those of the 16

respondents who, similarly, remain unconvinced that the hegemony of an audit culture can be fractured:

> So whilst you say that teachers are free to teach what they want in their own direction, unfortunately the direction's already set in stone and therefore you have to just arrive at the destination that somebody else has made for you.

Mistrust is driven by there being no indication from the government that the apparatus of league tables, testing and inspection will be dismantled. The centrality and importance of results was dealt with in the chapter analysing the first round of interviews, but their importance for this cohort remains uncontested: all but one respondent during some point in the second interview talks about them. Whether as a reaction to government pronouncements or to the possibility of exercising professional direction – and even extending to a range of comments that are peripheral and tangential – the importance of the generation of results remains ubiquitous. The extent to which their consideration dominates the discourse of these teachers is evinced typically by Steve who, despite his good-humoured insistence that he is relaxed about them, spends much of the interview returning to their centrality. Capturing the extent and depth of the importance of results is difficult; it is impractical to quote at length the full range of responses. It is interesting, therefore, as something of a sampling device, to look again at three of the respondents whose views were specifically identified when analysing the first interviews.

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Case 3: Helen, Leanne and Shona: still angry about churning out results

Helen, a secondary maths teacher, expressed anger and dissatisfaction in her first interview about the fact that, in her view, she knew she was a good teacher but that her lessons, and many of the other aspects of her teaching life, were dominated by the production of suitable results. That apparent anger is just as prevalent in her second interview in which she acknowledges that

the pressure placed on her by her school's management has its provenance at government level. In an animated encounter she speaks in apparently frustrated tones about exactly what it is that she and her colleagues are expected to do to address a relatively insignificant drop in GCSE examination results. 'We slipped. However, I don't even know the percentages any more. So we slipped; tut, tut; naughty, naughty. Why did we slip? What are we going to do to rectify that?' Compounding her irritation is a perception that she needs to be reminded of the need to do the best for her students by school leaders – something she would do anyway as a matter of course. When talking of exhortations from school leaders to identify ways of enhancing grades she insists that 'we do that already...I do it in my lessons. I know all the other Maths teachers do it in their lessons. Why do we need a meeting about it?' It seems that annoyance is Helen's central reaction to the drive for results.

Leanne was teaching English in a secondary school with a history of poor inspection reports when she was first interviewed. The constant striving for acceptable results at the expense of all else had made her question her commitment to teaching to the point where she had considered leaving the profession. She did not do so but moved to a selective school in a different geographical area. When speaking of her previous setting, her use of language is telling. She talks of how the prospect of not reaching target grades would mean that 'we'll be looked at and we'll have to refine our practices, but (teachers felt) absolute terror ....that's probably a strong word, but that's the way it felt.' When pushed on whether 'terror' is, perhaps, hyperbolic, she concedes that 'panic may be better. There was always an underlying sense of panic.' Leanne concedes that although the atmosphere at her new school is more supportive than inspectoral, the pressure to produce results is still there. She observes that 'there's lots more scrutiny in terms of looking at residuals than there ever was at my last school, and I know that if I don't produce the results in the summer, then I would be asked to account for exactly why.' In a telling aside, when asked if she will ever return to a more challenging school environment, she replies that she 'couldn't. I couldn't go

back to a school that was under so much pressure.' She then finishes her interview with something that seems to be a heartfelt plea:

I think it's the one thing that made my life a misery at my last school and it's the one thing that puts stress and pressure on senior management and teachers generally when we really should be focussing on each individual student, and how well they are doing for themselves, rather than…. 'this cohort of students should get this grade', regardless of their academic ability. This is what they're going to get....It seems ridiculous to me.

Shona expressed deep scepticism about the motives of the primary school where, as an NQT, she was first interviewed, believing the drive for results to be little more than a requirement of a flourishing school to continue to attract parents and children who would then perpetuate a virtuous circle of accomplishment. In her second interview she relates a telling anecdote about the school's manipulation of results at the end of the school year during which she had been first interviewed. Having completed an internal literacy assessment she finds her results queried by a school leader who believes Shona's judgements to have been too generous. Upset by this, she checks her findings with the school's Head of Literacy who validates her judgements. In her subsequent conversation with the school leader who was 'a bit apologetic…well not apologetic but she kind of changed the tone' she is told, despite this, to record results that were lower than her original judgements; according to Shona she 'literally, I mean pushed some children down like three sub-levels.' The justification for this is the need to have numerical demonstration of children's future progress. It is worth reproducing the transcript of this part of the interview, including my own interjection, in order to get the flavour of this encounter:

Shona: Basically they wanted to show they were really low and then suddenly they get their SATs results in Year 6 and there's a huge jump and they all get Level 5s and basically, it's the value added factor that they're interested in.

JB: I want to be absolutely clear about this. You have made a judgement about a level - there has been a dispute about it. It was scrutinised and confirmed that your level was correct, but nevertheless pressure was put on you to subdue those levels to demonstrate that value added had been added at a particular point?

Shona: Yep

It is worth re-emphasising that these three examples have been chosen simply for reasons of the organisational convenience of this particular piece of work: from the entire cohort, all but one interviewee is drawn to talking about results when considering the idea of their own autonomy. Attitudes to results are a central feature to be considered in an attempt to understand the scepticism and mistrust of teachers towards the new government and its proposals.

9.5   Ofsted: still firmly in the consciousness of teachers

Similarly, Ofsted remains firmly in the professional consciousness, with many responses immediately identifying it as the regulatory body that will be used to judge teachers as professionals and that, central to that judgement, as ever, is the promulgation of results. Kim's extended anecdote in the first interview captures this perfectly, but it is worth reiterating here that this is but one illustration that could have been replicated on the strength of evidence from both rounds of interviews. In the context of the second round, one of the foci of which was reaction to the government's plans, Ofsted doggedly remains as a factor referred to because of its importance as the overarching regulatory mechanism that, for this cohort, colours any talk of freedom or, as we shall see later, risk-taking. Kim herself remains unconvinced of a system which has forced her to seek 'the elusive Outstanding' sometimes at the cost of having 'more energy to make some of my lessons much better.' Laura complains of a process that she deems to be negative and which 'feels like you're being done to and this is the way you have to do things.' Robert sees the process as 'a

school of fear' which 'create(s) high, high pressure' and Maurice, questions the fairness of a process whereby 'what is very pressurised is what happens during the twenty minutes (of an inspection) when they come in, they say my lesson is not good enough or, you know, it was only satisfactory.' Jackie, having articulated the views of many respondents about a process which doesn't 'offer the avenues for improvement themselves' but 'merely tell(s) you where you've gone wrong' further explains the underlying mistrust by an apparent mismatch between the government's continuing commitment to this inspection system, comparing it with one that is 'essentially the same as the summative assessment we have everyday in our schools.'

As a consequence, therefore, of the retention of the same instruments of governance and scrutiny, the sense of mistrust of government among this cohort is strong. One of the principal purposes of this second set of interviews is to gauge teachers' initial thoughts about aspects of their professional autonomy against the impending changes and adjustments of a new government. Largely, as can be seen above, much of what is said forms an echo, or reinforcement, of ideas about earned, occupational autonomy within an overall framework of regulation that has become normalised. However, the second interviews also pressed teachers on their sense of ways in which they felt their autonomy was compromised by this overarching apparatus.

9.6   A sense of something better.

The following section attempts to capture the perceived intensity of feeling among this set of respondents about ways in which they could exercise greater autonomy if liberated from the standards' agenda. It begins by identifying the dilemma teachers face should they attempt adventurous approaches. It goes on to give a strong flavour of how they resent the restrictions under which they operate before concluding with a telling and illustrative anecdote along with a further reflection on Max's earlier account of a school enjoying a degree of liberation because of its impending closure.

Jackie's verbatim comments about the willingness to take risks – albeit that in other parts of her interviews she talks of tentative attempts at so doing – are illuminating:

> we talk about, you know, the children being willing to take risks, and what the consequences of taking risks are, and you know, with the kids it might be that they're afraid of getting a lower grade or they're afraid of looking stupid or they're afraid…and teachers have the same questions, don't they, that if you're going to take risks in the classroom, you have to look at what the consequences are. So the consequences are the lesson not really working or…you know, in an observation getting a bad grade or something like that, and a lot of the time we…we talk about taking risks but we're not incentivised to take risks really. We're incentivised to toe the line, to pootle along, to…you know…the risk taking that we talk about is not...really encouraged, despite the fact that we say that it is. I can't really think of any time where if I'd just done the lesson plan as is, which was a little bit boring, where taking the risk would've been beneficial in terms of me and observations and do you know what I mean?

Her comments are typical of an overriding sense of frustration from 18 of the 22 respondents about ways in which their thoughts and ideas have to be framed within the dominant discourse of measurement and accountability. Examples of this in responses are widespread. Maria would like to pursue topics in greater depth in her A level Sociology classes but is constrained by time and, in another typical twist, by students who 'tick off what we've done' and ask if they 'can leave it there now' as they push on to fulfil syllabus requirements. Liam talks of an observer commenting on a lesson being 'off topic' as he attempts to use Disney Princesses to illustrate the use of Venn diagrams. Marsha talks of how, having had a 'really exciting' time studying Ancient Greece and the Aztecs in the early part of the year, her school turns into a 'a sort of real boot camp' as SATs dominate the work. Maurice knows the inspirational value of using the real-life story of trapped Chilean miners or of Israeli spies even though it has 'nothing to do with the curriculum' and has

to battle to convince a senior teacher to do so. Laura, committed to getting children to perform music, bemoans the limitations of exam requirements; 'they're not making them better learners; they're not making then independent or giving them skills for life; it's just literally regurgitation to pass an exam.' Kim would like to take children to the Globe Theatre workshops in school time but 'there's no flexibility in the timetable'; Melissa battles to ensure that simplistic distinctions about what counts as 'literacy' does not distort planning; Shaun appears to be almost in despair about an assessment-led curriculum that leads 'bright young' teachers into using assessment criteria as the driving force of their lessons. Danielle, perhaps, sums up this prevalent sense of frustration when she speculates that that she could name 'at least ten members of staff who would love to be Robin Williams in *Dead Poets' Society.*'

An anecdote from Robert is extremely pertinent for what it tells us about how the broad concept of teacher autonomy is challenged on an everyday level and about how teachers' instincts and professional judgements can be stifled. During an interview conducted in autumn, he tells of how, in an urban setting, a child brings a conker to school to a class that contains 'children who don't know what a conker is.' His immediate dilemma is to decide whether or not to talk to the class about conkers or press on with numeracy and literacy lessons. He is aware of the fact that there are 'teachers in the school who are so by the book that they won't take time out' to discuss such matters, but despite his own enthusiasm to do so, and against his instinctive judgement, he postpones the conkers to later in the day when, by his own admission, the children have inevitably lost 'some of their enthusiasm.' He then continues to relate how he spoke about this to his mother, a retired Deputy Head, who tells him that she would 'change everything around...and they'd focus on' what had been brought in immediately. When asked whose approach is better, he is unequivocal in his certainty that it is 'my mum.' He is entirely convinced that if he were allowed to follow such instincts and not be bound by imposed constraints his students would learn more, 'get far more out of' school and be further inspired to explore and investigate. This conker story will resurface during later interviews with headteachers.

Finally, while examining this prevailing sense of there being more that teachers could offer, it is worth revisiting the different set of conditions enjoyed by Max. To recap: in a school facing closure, the senior leaders feel free to give staff more freedom to experiment and explore different approaches – with one outcome being improved results. Max talks of how, having enjoyed this freedom, teachers who now have to move on have visited their former colleagues to tell them they have been 'shell-shocked by what's hit them.' He goes on to say that they have encountered 'brick walls' and 'that they've had to perform to a different sort of regime.' Their 'experimental approach has not been appreciated' and they 'have come back to get ideas from us about how to cope with the new regime they're in.' By contrast, he talks of the way in which risk taking is now almost endemic in his own school and that his own observations had prompted him to conduct a very thorough check on the extent of this experimentation. His impressions are shot through with conviction: 'are people risk taking? By God they are, you know.'

It is worth reiterating as a conclusion to this section that 18 of the 22 respondents maintained that there was more that they could do were they not confined by the requirements of a system that favoured measurement and clear-cut, auditable data over the pursuit of ideas and greater possibilities in what they had set out to teach.

9.7 Summary of conclusions from both sets of teacher interviews and correspondence.

The final section of this chapter brings together the principal findings from both rounds of interviews in a series of summative statements. The section is divided into an identification of those findings that could be categorised as indicating broad satisfaction felt by these teachers about their professional autonomy and those that elicited dissatisfaction.

9.7.1 Broad satisfaction with aspects of teachers' professional autonomy

1. The interview process had been conducted in a way that the relationship between teachers and interviewer emerged as one of co-respondents. Respondents became engaged and interested in the process, freely offering responses both verbally and in writing. Over a third made overt reference to the process being valuable in terms of their own professional reflection and development with some identifying the fact that the process had enabled them to refine their own view of professional autonomy.

2. The interviews show that these teachers unequivocally embrace the concept of professional responsibility with willingness and do not contest the need to be accountable to those around them including senior management, parents and, above all, their own students.

3. All but two teachers interviewed acknowledge that it is possible for them to enjoy some degree of professional autonomy, albeit entirely contingent on their producing the outcomes required by their institution – almost always in the form of test results.

4. The role of headteachers is seen as crucial for the promotion of any professional autonomy and those interviewed largely felt supported by their own Heads.

5. On a localised, school-based level, these teachers largely felt that they enjoyed a degree of trust, albeit that a regime of inspection, both formal and informal, was sometimes felt to infract such trust.

9.7.2 Dissatisfaction in terms of professional autonomy.

1. The constant drive to demonstrate student progress in an overt way is a widespread complaint and one that elicits annoyance and frustration

from these teachers. This complaint is extensive and prevalent in teachers' responses

2. There is dissatisfaction with a degree of sophistry, occasionally descending into dishonesty, which can occur as a corollary to this quest for results and their eventual release into the public domain.

3. There is dissatisfaction that too much time is spent generating results for the collation of data at the expense of pursuing ideas that could enhance enjoyment and learning.

4. The degree of trust enjoyed at a localised, school-based level is in direct, stark contrast to teachers' views about their relationship with central government, towards whom an overwhelming sense of mistrust is directed. This mistrust is not based on party political allegiance.

5. Such mistrust stems from what is seen as the paradox of rhetoric about freedom being promoted simultaneously with a commitment to regulation, inspection and the release of information - seen by professionals as questionable - into the public domain.

6. This mistrust is compounded by suspicion that such rhetoric about freedom is seen as organisational and managerial but not as 'freedom to teach'.

7. The centrality of an inspection regime – Ofsted – and a continuing commitment to it in its inspectoral, as opposed to an advisory, role is seen as a further contributory factor to this mistrust.

8. There is a very strong sense among these teachers that they could offer their students more were they to feel confident about breaking with the requirements of the current standards' agenda.

These findings will be revisited in the final chapter of this study where their importance in terms of policy and practice will be examined. They are also used as the basis for a further set of interviews with headteachers and other influential individuals that follow in the next chapter.

Chapter 10

Reactions to the interviews from Heads and other interested parties: autonomy for those that can handle it.

You have to be very clear about where you can allow autonomy and where you can't – because it would all go to pot. (Bernadette, Headteacher)

The previous two chapters investigated the views of teachers with regard to their professional autonomy and identified some of the implications of this for their practice. The chapter that follows deals with the responses of four headteachers, and two other individuals with a professional interest in policy making, to the overall findings from the interviews with teachers documented above. The original cohort of teachers interviewed for this study contained no headteachers. This was done deliberately as the purpose of the study was to attempt to capture the experience of practitioners who were not ultimately responsible for major policy formulation in their places of work. Three of the cohort were deputies or Assistant Heads and one other participated in the meetings of the senior leadership team. None of the headteachers interviewed were from the same school as any of the respondents, thereby posing no immediate ethical problems in terms of infringing professional confidentiality.

The inclusion of this second interview cohort was not part of the original research design. It was included as the importance of the views and actions of headteachers emerged as a major theme in the teacher interviews with the majority of respondents identifying the role of the headteacher influencing their view of the extent of their professional autonomy. Given the importance attributed to headteachers in the comments of respondents, and congruent with the notion of their assumption of managerial as opposed to pedagogical roles (Chapter 2), a different dimension and perspective relating to professional autonomy might be gained in this way. By interviewing those closer to policy makers and policy making the second aspect of this thesis – an exploration of implications for policy and practice – also begins to be

addressed. The responses of this added cohort provides a degree of triangulation in the study as a whole. The purpose of the interviews was to gauge the response to the comments of practising teachers from those responsible for the implementation and interpretation of policy. These responses, in their turn, inform the final part of this study, which interrogates the importance of teachers' autonomy in relation to the implementation of policy and practice. As well as the four headteachers interviewed, the findings were shared with a senior researcher at the Department for Education and an experienced education journalist and author.

10.1   The headteachers

Unlike the interview cohort, I had no immediate professional connection with any of the headteachers interviewed, although I had met two of them on previous occasions. They were selected either because of their prominence as national figures in educational debate (two similarly high-profile figures were approached but did not consent to being interviewed) and in the cases of Bernadette and Charles because of their position as headteachers of comprehensives in close geographical proximity but of contrasting standings in league tables. As with the selection of the teacher cohort (see Chapter 8), the selection of this smaller body was not an attempt to manufacture a cross-section. Nonetheless, as indicated below in the descriptions of their settings, an attempt was made to interview headteachers from schools whose success as measured against performance indicators was markedly different. Beyond this, a degree of opportunism was used in the selection of this sample along with local knowledge and the use of some professional networks. All were interviewed by prior appointment in either March or April, 2011, with Arthur's interview being conducted by telephone. As with the entire original cohort, respondents were furnished with transcripts of their interview and the sound file if requested. Responses to these transcripts were limited to very minor corrections or clarifications.

Arthur is recently retired as Headteacher of a large and successful school on the outskirts of London and has been an advisor to government on a range of educational issues.

Bernadette is a Headteacher of seven years' standing in a comprehensive school in a largely affluent town on the outskirts of London. The school exists in a geographical area of fierce parental competition for places in schools that fare well in league tables. Bernadette's school, although performing at around national average in terms of results, is not numbered among these.

Charles has been the Headteacher of a large, prestigious comprehensive school on the outskirts of London for six years, with thirteen years' experience as a Head prior to that. The school is over-subscribed and far exceeds the national average in terms of examination results.

David is a senior representative for an organisation representing Headteachers, a post he assumed in 2010 with fifteen years' experience of headship beforehand. His position in the organisation allows him access to government ministers and their advisors on a formal and informal level.

10.2   Other respondents

Edward is a senior researcher at the Department for Education (DfE) who has served as a senior civil servant under a succession of ministers responsible for schools and education. As such he has frequent access to ministers and their immediate advisers.

Frank is an education journalist and author whose work appears regularly in the educational press and broadsheet newspapers and whose educational research has been cited in parliamentary committees.

All respondents were informed verbally about the context of the study and furnished with a slightly amended version of the findings from the interviews with teachers which appear at the end of Chapter 9. The amendment in this

briefing from the overall findings was that which related to the way in which the interview process had been of professional benefit to respondents: this was not deemed relevant for the conversations with this cohort. In the largely unstructured interviews that followed they were variously asked to comment on those areas that may have been of interest to them. As with their teaching counterparts, they needed little prompting, with interviewer participation being far outstripped by respondents' own comments.

10.3   Overview

The following section deals with those areas that, given the choice to respond as they saw fit, emerged as being of most interest to this second cohort. These responses have been grouped into four broad, related areas that, with a few brief exceptions and digressions, constituted the bulk of what was discussed. These were:

1. Concern with the issue of accountability – a generalised term that is further examined below.
2. A consideration of the extent, and desirability, of teacher autonomy in individual classrooms.
3. Reflections about the extent to which schools may be able to enjoy a degree of autonomy.
4. A shared, although not universal, mistrust of government policy, stemming largely from the paradox of the rhetoric of autonomy against a background of prescription.

This chapter deals with each of these issues in turn before concluding with a section that discusses the disconnection between some aspects of the views of both cohorts and the implications of this for policy and practice.

10.4   Accountability

For four of these six respondents – Arthur, Charles, David and Edward - accountability emerges as the most important topic in terms of their response.

The term is used in a loosely defined way by various respondents, with only Edward, who specifically mentions parents and, significantly, the Treasury, identifying definite entities to which individuals are accountable. The concluding part to this section interrogates this looseness more closely.

Given an open invitation to comment on the teachers' responses – both positive and negative – it is accountability upon which these four respondents choose to remark first. During each interview they were reminded that, broadly speaking, teachers had no difficulty with the concept of being held accountable for their actions and that their sense of duty, especially to their students, was beyond question. Nonetheless, the responses of Charles and Arthur in particular are noticeable for the manner in which they turn in this context, unprompted, to Ofsted. Both express strong and loquacious support for this body as an effective and valuable mechanism to drive such accountability. Arthur expresses the view that Ofsted should revel in its role as a feared and unwelcome visitor to schools and Charles sees the profession itself at fault for having allowed teaching to become 'very unionised, very transactional…we didn't self-regulate, therefore we got regulated.' In an interesting extrapolation on this topic, Charles goes on to point out that, under the new government's proposals, should a school achieve an Outstanding rating, teachers 'may never see Ofsted in their career' – a potential situation of the reward of self-regulation for the compliant and successful to which we will return. What is noticeable in the responses of Arthur and Charles is that teachers' complaints that too often their daily practice is affected by the need to 'produce' is treated in an apparently dismissive manner. Arthur goes as far as to identify the 'curse of individuality' that can stand in the way of a school that needs to be 'booked into the achievement culture.' Charles, when pressed about teachers who are happy to assume responsibility and obligation but who feel constrained in their daily practice, replies that he is 'not convinced that (he is) a driver of the standards' agenda in this school' before, in an apparent inconsistency, continuing to speak at some length about his professional satisfaction with the school's record of examination achievement and the internal observation regime used to monitor this.

What emerges from the responses of Arthur and Charles is a clear disconnection between the preoccupations of teacher and manager. Teachers are, undeniably, irritated by, and resentful of, the inspection regime of Ofsted and its presence as part of a wider apparatus that has an impact on their professional autonomy. Nonetheless, there is a willing and unequivocal acceptance on their part of the need to be answerable to a range of interested parties. The responses of Arthur and Charles, however, seem to presuppose a need for a strict regime of scrutiny as the inevitable and necessary means of regulating a profession that, left to itself, would somehow diminish the entitlement of those for whom they are responsible. Nonetheless, Charles states that he starts from a position in which he trusts teachers unless he is led to believe that such trust is misplaced: 'I assume they're good until I'm told they're not.'

The insistent reference to Ofsted that is characteristic of the responses of Charles and Arthur is not mirrored by Bernadette who says that she has 'mixed views about Ofsted (but) not because I'm opposed to a sense of accountability.' Edward talks about the body being the 'ultimate sanction' that is part of a process in which 'parents would want some kind of quality assurance, wouldn't they?' and Frank, although he admits to not trusting Ofsted and acknowledging that teachers are unhappy with it, believes that it is important to 'provide some kind of information to the public' about schools.

David sees accountability rather differently. In responses that diverge markedly from those of Arthur and Charles, he expresses sympathy with classroom teachers suffering the burden of 'an incredible emphasis on inspection; on judgements; on grades and so on' whilst expressing criticism of an 'accountability framework that has just grown and become so bloated that it's driving everything.' The problem, as he sees it, is that the accountability framework has been a starting point for what schools and teachers do 'rather than the end of a process.' He is supported in this view by Frank, whose own researches have led him to believe that a system that says 'that what happens at the end is all that matters' is one where 'you've completely put the cart before the horse.' David goes on to articulate the notion that a 'scientific

model of management' has led to a situation where 'we have really constrained our profession.' He mentions Ofsted only infrequently and is critical of aspects of its implementation in practice. In particular, he takes issue with the proposal to liberate successful schools from such formal inspection as well as with the way in which blunt judgements affect schools and headteachers. David, in common with the teaching cohort, does not contest the need and desirability for accountability; unlike Arthur and Charles, however, his discourse reflects the preoccupations of teachers and their concerns about their daily practice rather than the necessity of generating outcomes, the nature of which have been imposed rather than negotiated.

Two questions emerge from these responses. Why do some of these respondents wish to emphasise the need for accountability when teachers themselves do not contest this and – the corollary to this query – to whom do the various participants deem themselves accountable? Frank, whose own research has enabled him to make first-hand judgements about what he characterises as a pressurised, high-stakes system, makes illuminating remarks to help us understand this. He observes that teachers operate in a system where it is necessary for those who lead schools on a daily basis to conflate the needs of the institution with the needs of those – teachers and pupils – who work within it. In such a system, the production of good outcomes is axiomatic to continued success. Should the needs of those within such a system (the students) be met, that is a desirable bonus: if not, the success of the institution overrides any mishaps experienced by individuals along the way. For Arthur and Charles, the running of a successful institution is their professional raison d'être; leaving the generation of good outcomes to chance is not an option and the concerns of individual teachers are subsidiary to this. Such concerns, worthy as they may deem them to be, are of secondary importance to being, to reiterate Arthur's words, 'booked into the achievement culture.'

Identifying the reason for the preoccupation of headteachers with accountability is straightforward when one considers the importance of maintaining market dominance for the institution for which they are

responsible. However, it is interesting to note that the notion of who it is, precisely, to whom they are accountable is, in some cases, somewhat hazier. This is not so with David who is unequivocal that anything that teachers do has to involve 'a professional judgement about what they think is right for the class.' Bernadette, who does not choose to prioritise accountability, speaks on a number of occasions and at length during her interview about how, for her, the day-to-day experience of her students is absolutely paramount. It is worth remembering that the teacher cohort talks – usually within the first sentence – of their obligation to their students as their immediate priority. Teachers are clear about where ultimate accountability lies.

What seems to emerge from these various - and varying – comments about the nature and extent of accountability from this second cohort is that the status of the respondent, and his or her institution, is the determining factor when it comes to identifying to whom they are answerable. Put baldly, Arthur and Charles have enjoyed responsibility for schools that have thrived in the market and whose involvement has prompted recognition and reward, both personal and professional, from a range of bodies – parents, local communities, non-governmental and governmental institutions. Significantly, their comments refer infrequently to children or young people. Bernadette, conversely, who enjoys no such plaudits other than localised parental support for her school, speaks of little else other than the curriculum offer at her school and the experience of students within it. Unsurprisingly, Edward reflects the terms of his own professional responsibilities; the measurement of those pre-determined outcomes valued by his ministerial employers and, ultimately, the Treasury. David and Frank, who, it must be emphasised, have no immediate, quotidian responsibility for the generation of educational outcomes, concentrate more closely on the effect the standards' regime has on the teachers and students who experience it at first hand. This unevenness is now reflected as we turn to respondents' reflections about any autonomy enjoyed by individual teachers or their schools.

10.5   Of conkers and code-breakers: autonomy in the classroom itself.

In terms of illustrating teachers' frustrations with restrictions on their autonomy, a number of pertinent anecdotes from teacher interviews were referred to when taking the discussion about accountability forward from the general to the particular. Of these, the two most commonly used were the stories of the conkers and code-breaking, cited in earlier chapters. To recap briefly, Helen talks of how she is happily diverted to talk about the Enigma code-breaking episode in World War II by her Year 8 maths class, only to reflect on the fact that she had 'wasted' a lesson by so doing. Robert delays discussion about conkers picked up by children on the way to school until the end of the day, thereby losing much spontaneity and wonderment, because he is anxious about pressing on with the day's literacy and numeracy requirements. When pressed for their reaction to these workaday manifestations of restrictions on teachers' judgements, the responses of this second cohort are instructive.

David empathises with such instances, reflecting that 'some of the best lessons I taught were the ones where maybe a child asked a spontaneous question (and) you thought, hang on a sec, let's just put the lesson plan to one side and let's just do this,' but recognises that teachers may not do such a thing if their principal preoccupation is 'about how many you get from a D to a C and so on.' Edward, however, expresses a view that teachers may be victims of their own timidity. He invokes an age where teachers 'did have *seemingly* an awful lot of autonomy' (my emphasis) about which he is somewhat vague – 'it was quite a while ago, wasn't it?' - before going on to observe that 'it seems to me that maybe teachers are not sufficiently using the autonomy they do have, or are they scared, I don't know.' In seeing this apparently self-enforced diffidence on the part of teachers he is supported by Arthur who identifies an unnecessary 'angst' among teacher who are, in his view, freer than they think. In the same vein, both Bernadette and Charles are

adamant that they encourage risk-taking and experimentation among their teachers, the former expanding upon this point with some force:

> I have said in the staff room, don't stick to…the bog standard. Raise your game. Do something a bit different. And I've said that every INSET September. This is your year to do something a bit outside the box.

Charles recognises that some of his staff would feel constrained in similar ways to those embodied in the conkers and code-breakers anecdotes, but goes on to say that he doesn't 'believe that that's the sort of accountability I want in school.' Against such expressions of liberality, the question persists as to why teachers do, indeed, feel restricted?

The answer lies in the notion of an earned autonomy for those deemed capable of dealing with such freedom, counterpoised by a default diet of careful conformity for the rest. Bernadette is clear that this is related, as she sees it, to teachers' individual capabilities. She considers herself to have been free of such restrictions because 'I was quite a good teacher' but that 'some teachers …need those structures to help them.' They are able when 'painting by numbers' to 'get there in the end and deliver' lessons that are 'sound, satisfactory, verging on the good' by so doing. In terms of 'going off-piste' or risk-taking, her judgement is that 'there's not many teachers can do that.' Charles believes that much of what happens with his teachers is 'self-driven' but goes on to take the conversation to a discussion of target grades and 'residuals' – the measure by which a teacher's results in a subject or group is compared within the institution - thus revealing a view of independence on the part of teachers that remains bound by a regulated framework. Although he chooses not to articulate any connection with this state of affairs and his view of teacher autonomy, he freely admits to knowing that '*some of my staff* wouldn't think they are free' (my emphasis). Frank points to a school from his own research, significantly in an Ofsted category denoting failure, where the response to perceived failure was 'relentless testing, testing, testing' and ties this in with observations gleaned from elsewhere that 'teachers feel they have more freedom when the test results are better.' This concept of a sliding-scale

of permissible autonomy is amplified when we consider what this second set of respondents have to say about the autonomy of schools in general, as well as that of the teaching force within them.

10.6   Autonomy at school level: freedom for some or equality for all?

I think we've got a real polarisation within our school system at the moment. We've got some schools which are almost immune…whatever they do. Then there are other schools which are much more vulnerable…and those schools have to jump through every hoop when some new initiative comes out. (David)

David's view about the way in which schools become 'polarised' in this way comes during a discussion about the proposed introduction from central government of an English Baccalaureate – the use of results in five or six central subjects as the factor by which outcomes are measured - which, even some six weeks after its initial mooting, had slipped into educational discourse as the Ebacc. He tells of how headteachers, desperate for advice on the introduction of this narrow, yet high-stakes, measure of success had already contacted his organisation. His response is instructive and worth reproducing at length:

Our advice was, no; hold your head; you're in charge of the school. You lead it; you make your decisions as to what's important. But it's very difficult for people to do that, particularly if they're in a school which is near the floor standard or in Special Measures or in some sort of difficulty. If you're a very successful school, you can ride out that sort of thing, but I understand where people were coming from, and it's had all sorts of perverse effects.

While David maintains an apparent degree of equanimity about, and professional distance from, this proposed innovation, Bernadette appears to become angry and talks at length, seeming to be visibly infuriated with a

measure that 'somebody in some cupboard has come up with' and which, in her view, demonstrably 'doesn't suit our children.' As she continues her comment, the polarisation of which David speaks becomes ever more evident. The nub of Bernadette's professional dilemma is that the proposed measures of success are not those that she sees as appropriate for the school for which she has responsibility – and yet she knows that she will be constrained to work to them or suffer market failure as a consequence. In one of a series of similar episodes in which Bernadette questions her own bravery, the situation is captured in the following exchange:

> **Bernadette***: But am I brave enough to say, these are our children; these are our stakeholders, this is how we're going to carry on? No, because actually the impact of that would be…and I know this, it would be falling rolls which would then lead to the difficulties … and I'm not prepared to do that to staff or the existing children.*
>
> **JB***: You've got to live with the fact that you are responsible?*
>
> **B.** Absolutely
>
> **JB***. For operating in a system that's not of your making?*
>
> **B**. You know, but it doesn't sit easy with me.

Significantly, Charles, whose school's examination results must, by default, have already met the requirements of the proposed Ebacc, chooses not to mention this new measure at all.

What emerges from these headteachers' views of this proposed innovation is a clear exposure of the fact that for some, to borrow David's phraseology, 'riding out' the requirements is easily done, but presents a pedagogic straightjacket for others – those who usually sit at the less favoured end of league tables and public approbation. Frank catches the practical implications of this unevenness neatly and simply when he observes that:

It seems to me that if you're telling a school that potentially we'll close you down or sack the headteacher if you don't improve your results, you're likely to feel the need to focus on teaching to the test quite a lot.

The responses of David, Bernadette and Frank point to a situation where the concept of earned autonomy has become normalised: Charles' support for the idea of the removal of the need for Ofsted for outstanding schools (contested by David and his organisation) is a neat summation of the idea that, as with some teachers, some schools will be allowed to fly and flourish while others will forever march mechanically through their educational drills.

However, for Edward and Arthur, this disparity of opportunity is a price worth paying if the outcomes - for all children – are successful ones. For them, restricted autonomy may be an unintended consequence, but such restriction may elicit a guarantee of minimal entitlement. Arthur cites the accomplishments of New Labour's first Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, who unapologetically risked the ire of the teaching profession by failing to undo any of the reforms of his Conservative predecessors and insisted, provocatively, that teachers were too ready to blame social deprivation for academic non-achievement. Edward sees the promotion of equal opportunity as a central component in the approach of the current government and its predecessors and expresses genuine surprise when told that not one teacher in the interview cohort had considered the dimension of equality or social mobility in their comments about the drive to improve results and, in his terms, to 'narrow the achievement gap.' He, too, commends the fact that 'inspection will become less frequent for good schools so that's giving more autonomy' and explains that an earned autonomy is the driver behind government thinking with Ministers not being 'tolerant because they don't think the public is tolerant of failure.'

Despite these divergent views about the acceptability of high-stakes accountability on the autonomy of teachers and schools, all respondents are unequivocal in their view that the concept of greater freedom for successful

schools, along with greater concomitant restriction for those less so, is a fact of educational life in English schools in 2011.

10.7   Central government - a common enemy?

All respondents acknowledged the mistrust of central government articulated by teachers and most expressed a broad agreement, albeit that this was more temperately expressed in their responses.

Arthur understands the frustrations of teachers with the proposals of the coalition government and expresses a degree of sympathy with them, going so far as to say that he shares this mistrust. Along with Charles, he tempers his comments by locating teachers' mistrust in what he sees as a natural reaction to place blame on a distant and faceless entity. Nonetheless, while acknowledging the 'radicalism' of the new government, he rather damningly dubs this 'the radicalism of the Home Counties of the 1950s.' Charles and Edward are more generous in their assessment of the government's motives and intentions, albeit that they, too, recognise the unpopularity of its proposals among teachers. The former remarks approvingly that 'they're not making massive changes and they are focussing on learning' and the latter, somewhat more pragmatically, explains that 'there are tensions in some areas and that's because Ministers wish to drive through change; that's what they're elected to do.' David, even though he has profound criticisms of the government's approach as we shall see, concedes that he would 'never question the passionate commitment of our ministers.' However, when the conversation turns to an examination of the central paradox identified by teachers – that of an exhortation to be autonomous against a background of prescription – such placatory attitudes fade.

It is significant that Edward, one of the strongest supporters of the coalition government's proposals, recognises potential criticism when expressing his belief that the activities of teachers are not over-prescribed, by quipping that 'you're going to say the word 'phonics' to me in a minute' – in a reference to

the government's insistence that the synthetic phonics approach be universally adopted when teaching reading. By doing so he exposes the way in which what David calls the 'Govian paradox' is difficult to ignore. David expands on this at some length:

> And there's this idea yes, we want autonomy, we want everyone to be free to do what they like, but you've got to teach phonics; you've got to do the Ebacc, you've got to do all these things, and it isn't freedom, and that is the problem with the White Paper.

He finishes this comment by expressing the view that many of the government's ambitions are, in principle, unexceptionable, but that it 'has now got to have the courage to let the profession take (them) through.' His misgivings about this paradox are echoed more volubly by Bernadette throughout her interview, which begins with her asserting that in all her years as a Head she had 'never felt so powerless, overwhelmed, pressurised and stressed' because of government interventions and concludes with her view that, if faced with the Secretary of State, she 'wouldn't be able to articulate' her feelings 'because of emotion and rage.' This rage, which seems, at points, to be visibly evident during the interview, is best summarised in her observation that, despite the school's curriculum offer being acknowledged as outstanding by Ofsted, 'with one fell swoop, somebody has come in and decided that children are better off studying' a range of subjects, some of which are unsuitable and irrelevant as she sees them. Frank talks of how the government's assertion that it wants to 'step back' whilst insisting on holding teachers 'to account for the results at the end' is a situation where 'two ideas don't go together.'

There is something of a broad consensus here between the two cohorts and it resides in an appreciation of the paradox to which all respondents so frequently refer. The suspicion remains that talk of freedom and autonomy sits uneasily with a government whose early announcements not only underline its commitment to a public accountability built upon inspection and

league tables, but which has gone further, identifying a hierarchy of subject status and expressing a commitment to particular teaching methodologies.

10.8   Differences and similarities in the views of the two cohorts

There is no obvious or immediate consensus in most of what this second cohort has to say, but three broad trends emerge.

1.   There is a strong sense of agreement that a paradox exists, stemming from government's public espousal of the concept of autonomy alongside concurrent requirements to produce examination success in particular subjects (the Ebacc). This extends to methodological restrictions when it comes to an insistence on the centrality of using the synthetic phonics approach to the teaching of reading.

2.   Some headteachers feel that teachers may overplay the extent of these restrictions and that greater freedom exists to take independent approaches than teachers appreciate. Both serving and retired headteachers are insistent that they, personally, allow and encourage teachers to take risks and be experimental.

3.   The most noticeable rift between the two cohorts exists around notions of accountability. While teachers themselves embrace their own notion of this, locating it for the most part in an unarguable sense of obligation to their students, for headteachers any sense of self-governance has to be validated through a framework of pre-determined outcomes. They broadly accept the need for such outcomes to be controlled through the apparatus of scrutiny and high-stakes, publicly available comparisons on which funding and the very survival of their institutions depend.

10.9   Conclusions and implications

To make the case that the divergence of opinion identified in point 3 above represents a clear-cut division between techno-rationalism and a more humanistic vision of education would be to overstate the case. Nevertheless, what it does seem to point towards is the existence of fault-lines in terms of a common conception of teacher autonomy. Teachers accept the need to comply with needs of the wider institution and are capable of compromising their own ideas and idealisms in order to do so. This is not merely a case of pragmatic survivalism. Given their unequivocal commitment to the well-being of their students, teachers recognise the need to meet students' aspiration for good results and consider it a dereliction of duty not to attempt to equip them to achieve them. Despite this realistic approach, an enduring sense of being able to offer something more wide-ranging and stimulating characterises the responses of many in the teacher cohort. Some of those charged with implementing policy at a higher level view matters somewhat differently. Although conscious of the attraction of having autonomous teachers interpreting the curriculum in innovative ways, the notion of an earned autonomy is prevalent in many of the comments of this second set of respondents; not every teacher, it would seem, is ready for autonomy. When placed in the context of the need to survive in a competitive market place, the need to generate results is the absolute bottom line for most of these respondents. That schools at the less favoured end of this market feel such pressure even more acutely is a relevant and interesting observation and one which will be revisited when looking at the overall implications for this study in the final chapter.

10.10 Chapter summary

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 have explored and analysed the data from 28 professionals acquired through some 28 hours of interviewing and the

submission of some 4,400 words written by them in response to promptings in terms of contemporaneous government announcements. These data have demonstrated that for teachers, professional autonomy exists in a limited form at an institutional level, contingent on the generation of acceptable student outcomes. If there is a consensual view for those at higher managerial or organisational level – and it has to be acknowledged that this is a somewhat broad conclusion – it is that conformity may well be a price worth paying for producing student achievement. The final chapter that follows reflects on the experience of these teachers, framed as it is by a range of political, ideological and economic forces. It considers whether power wishes to recognise such findings and, congruent with the title of this study, considers what impact the outcomes from it may have for future policy and practice.

Chapter 11

Discussion and conclusion: pessimism of the spirit, optimism of the will?

This final chapter draws on what has been written so far to draw the conclusion that despite the plethora of forces that may seem to threaten the notion of teachers' professional autonomy in England, there remains a clear recognition by such teachers that they have not entirely renounced a collective consciousness that retains its roots in a liberal humanist view of education. The chapter reflects on the ways in which this position corresponds to the views about professional autonomy of published commentators reviewed in earlier chapters. Given what these findings reveal in terms of teachers' professional autonomy, the chapter goes on to consider the question as to what impact this may have on policy makers who have shown themselves unwilling to give audience to a great deal of educational research. Possibilities for potential resistance to the current hegemonic position are then considered before a final reflection on the significance of teachers defending their autonomy. The limitations of the study are considered along with an assessment of its contribution to knowledge and a consideration of potential developments arising from its findings.

11.2   What have we learnt? Recapping what has been revealed from the study.

Prior to a discussion about the relevance and importance of teachers' views of their professional autonomy in terms of emerging policy and practice, it is worth summarising what the interviews and correspondence with respondents revealed.

The data from this study demonstrate that teachers believe that, consistent with notions of managed and earned autonomy, there are spaces within their professional practice for the exercising of a degree of controlled

independence of action. The nature and standing of their setting, particularly when made public through league tables and Ofsted judgements, plays an important part in the extent to which they are afforded autonomy. The role of the headteacher is crucial in determining the level of any autonomous activity. Inspection and observation are perceived as obvious manifestations of a scrutiny that is inconsistent with an autonomous approach. However, by far the most frequently mentioned factor perceived by teachers to infract their autonomy is an overwhelming requirement to produce measurable outcomes, most markedly in terms of externally validated test and examination results. Almost all harbour an enduring notion of having more to offer than is made available through what they see as a reductive and restricting curriculum. As a consequence of this, the language of policy that foregrounds a notion of autonomy while simultaneously outlining regulation and prescribed methodology, is seen as irksome and unhelpful. Headteachers' views about this are mixed and, it seems, largely dependent on where they, as individuals and heads of organisations, are placed in terms of recognised success. Most, along with a very small minority of respondents, have little problem with the concept of intervention and the imposition of methodologies as a necessary requirement for those who have not, in the telling words of one of their number, 'bought into the culture of achievement.' Almost all recognise the paradox of policy rhetoric about autonomy coupled with regulatory frameworks and expectations that demand compliance with pre-determined criteria. Significantly, most believe that teachers could enjoy more autonomy than they do and that they, as leaders, encourage this. Somewhere between the positions of these two cohorts and the range of personal opinions expressed as part of the data gathering exercise, the concept of a governed and earned autonomy emerges as the prevalent outcome – and, for the teachers involved, this is the best, perhaps that they can hope for. Nevertheless, an enduring idealism characterises the comments of many respondents: the force of policy has not entirely been able to prevent teachers from being able to 'retain some sense of what would be ideal, even some utopianism' (Hammersley, 2008:750).

The correspondence between the findings from the study and the views of the commentators referred to earlier is of interest. Chapter 4 outlined the way in which various conceptions of autonomy emerged and were reformulated in their turn, starting with Dale's characterisation of the move from 'licensed' to 'regulated' that began in the later 1970s and culminated in Storey's 2009 description of an earned autonomy – a term which in itself is paradoxical (Bates, 2009). These changing concepts had been contextualised in the two preceding chapters by characterising this erosion of autonomy as a direct result of policy driven by neo-liberal objectives. The theoretical framework of this study, resting as it does on underpinning Marxist ideas, is not the one that informs the thinking of all commentators cited, although many do place the diminution of autonomy in the context of the dominance of neo-liberal ideology. The clear consensus that does emerge from commentators and critics, notwithstanding differences of emphases, is that the notion of education as a producer of human capital is the preferred, if not the only, model of choice for policy makers. The emergence of this consensus is correspondent with the earlier discussion in Chapter 3 which identifies the reduction of curriculum theory to the measurement of standards – a move that, in itself, prepares the ground for easier measurement and, ultimately, marketization. This policy drive transcends changes of government as outlined in Chapters 5 and 6, with adherence to market ideology smoothing over political differences at an individual or party level. In short, the theoretical consensus is that the three and a half decades from Callaghan's speech have witnessed the triumph of the managerial over the pedagogical.

The comments of the 22 teachers in this study reflect this very clearly. They acknowledge that as long as they do what is expected of them in terms of producing data and results then, in some circumstances, they can be afforded a degree of autonomy. Yet one returns to Braverman's observation cited in Chapter 4 about workers who 'have the illusion of making decisions by choosing among fixed and limited alternatives designed by a management which deliberately leaves insignificant matters open to choice' (Braverman, 1974:39). One could argue here, and I believe that I would do so, along, I suspect, with the teachers involved, that the use of 'insignificant' here is rather

too disparaging a term. Nonetheless, the fact that 18 of the 22 respondents clearly articulated the idea that they could offer more to their students if allowed to do so, with 9 of these responses being significantly lengthy, is a clear indication of the fact that such constraint upon their professional practice is acutely felt. Over both rounds of interviews not one respondent failed to mention the centrality of their performance in terms of producing outcomes as the principal means by which they hoped to garner professional trust from managers. The ubiquity of Ofsted in responses – and here, too, it is worth a reminder that the term was not used in the framing of any questions or prompts from the interviewer – is a further indication of the extent to which teachers feel themselves controlled and over-scrutinised. It is also significant here that this dislike for a body seen almost universally as intrusive, unsympathetic and misdirected in its foci, is not always shared by headteachers, some of whom are firm advocates of the control it imposes. Teachers' responses and the analysis of these in Chapters 8 and 9 leave little doubt that, in line with the theoretical position of a range of commentators, teaching in the first decade of the twenty-first century has been, and looks to remain, a managed profession.

Parallel to this drive towards managerialism, a strong element of professional acquiescence is identified by many commentators, especially towards the end of the decade (Whitty, 2007; Ball, 2008; Furlong, 2008; Beck, 2009; Storey, 2009). There is an elision here of a number of theoretical positions, borrowing chiefly from the ideas of Foucault and Gramsci, concerning self-disciplining individuals or organisations and the eventual emergence of a consent to domination. Ball captures this in his formulation of the notion of survivalism and Furlong expresses concern about the construction of compromise over principle at every turn. Respondents certainly demonstrate an understanding of compromise in the way in which they tailor their professional beliefs to suit the demands of their institution. Whether or not this acquiescence is ubiquitous is open to question and it was considered tactless to put to respondents themselves, suggesting, as it does, a degree of weakness or tractability on their part. Yet the notion that those new to the profession in particular have swallowed whole the culture of a system that is narrow,

reductive and de-professionalising is one that appears to enjoy currency among many experienced teachers – whose numbers in terms of their percentage of the workforce are not reflected in this cohort (see Chapter 8). It is, however, captured in the observation of one such experienced respondent, Shaun, who identifies what he sees as a generation of teachers who are happy to use pre-planned resources and to 'teach to that' and 'want to be told what to do.' As an unplanned part of the original research design, I put this proposition to the test.

The introductory chapter to this work refers to the fact that professional colleagues evinced genuine interest about this thesis and were often eager to volunteer information and illustrative anecdotes: a brief episode in December, 2011 provides a further instance of this. Wishing to test the proposition in the previous paragraph, I emailed 13 teachers with whom I was professionally acquainted, each of whom had a minimum of fifteen years' experience. A preamble explained the purpose of my approach which was to quickly test my perception that experienced colleagues often expressed the view that few new entrants to the profession were willing to challenge the status quo. I went on to describe my characterisation of the ubiquity of measurability, using the term 'standards' agenda' as a convenient descriptor. Respondents were asked to indicate, on a five-point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', their response to the notion that in the last five to ten years teachers new to the profession were prepared to challenge this agenda. The opportunity to offer a further written response was given, along with a clear acknowledgement that the impending Christmas holiday was probably more of a current preoccupation for these colleagues than aiding me with my research. Within two days I had received seven responses with the final number rising to twelve by the end of the year. All bar one response indicated disagreement (7) or strong disagreement (4) and the one response in the 'agree' section was qualified by a note that explained this would only happen 'if they were any good.' In the view of this small and somewhat random cohort, captured in something of a snapshot, it is clear that the perception of acquiescence is strong.

Just as compelling as this bald set of responses, however, are the data provided by the voluntary written responses with, once again, busy practitioners demonstrating a willingness to write about something that seemed to be very close to their hearts; ten of these correspondents write some 1400 words between them. One respondent observes: 'it's a good question, because I could go on about this at length – and on the second day of my holiday too!' Two points merit mention here. The first is the nature of the comments themselves which appear to be heartfelt and passionate. One teacher despairs of the 'Orwellian trance of compliance' that she observes around her while another bemoans the 'general gobbledegook of pseudo-management speak that has permeated our profession' and sees 'very little challenge to it from the new generation.' Such sentiments are common and are summarised by a primary school headteacher of some twenty years who observes that 'it is all they have known so they don't imagine it can be different.' The second point of interest is that, once again, I would argue that this is an issue that has resonance within the profession and one that elicits genuine professional engagement. Whether or not power considers this to be of relevance to policy making, for working practitioners issues around professional autonomy are of great significance.

Does this apparent acquiescence presuppose the impossibility of resistance? If commentators and critics who concern themselves either with the (lack of) curriculum theory or the development of managerialism have reached a degree of consensus on such matters, they are divided and disparate when it comes to the possibilities of opposition or the development of alternatives. This haziness is understandable in the light of the paucity of credible 'alternative' models and the somewhat inchoate nature of organised opposition – notwithstanding the comments in 11.3 below. I have some genuine sympathy with this position. As an avowed Marxist I am often, rather gleefully and gloatingly, confronted by opponents who challenge me to point to one good, living example of an egalitarian, socialist state. My standard response is to point out that with the continuation of war, starvation and the permanent possibility of the collapse of international finance, capitalism is itself hardly living up to its own publicity. Resistance and the construction of

strategy are not, of course, the domain of academics and, as such, it is improper to berate writers for, in most cases, either ignoring the possibility of spaces for resistance or rather airily hoping that it will somehow emerge spontaneously. Fundamentally, their position is a pessimistic one, denying – or at least side-lining – the agency of teachers as individuals or as a collective to bring about changes. I will return to any such possibilities for resistance having first considered the unequal nature of the relationship between teachers, researchers and those in power.

11.2   Does power care about either research or teacher autonomy?

What is meant by 'power' in the discussion that follows rests largely on the notion of the exercise of control by state elites that uphold the capitalist system (Miliband, 1983), the access to which legitimises dominant ideologies, enabling them to assert control over others (Young, 1971) and to exercise such power in a way that is 'formidably coercive' (Eagleton, 2011:210) over sections of society. In short, it is a discussion of the notion of 'power over' rather than 'power to' (Nigam, 1996). For the purposes of such discussion, the conception of power is encapsulated in a consideration of the actions of those who exercise it while holding political office. This is not to diminish the importance of the wider Marxist view of power being concentrated in institutions and arrangements that work for the benefit for those who own the means of production. It is, however, in the immediate locale of the formulation of education policy that its relevance for this study resides and for the respondents in this study it remains apparently impermeable and aloof. Even given that their voices are strong ones – holders of posts of responsibility and dedicated practitioners driven by a sense of duty and responsibility – will their voices ever be heard by power? What are the implications of this study for the 'policy' of its title? Fundamentally, the question is whether research of this sort, attempting as it does to capture the lived experience of teachers through qualitative research and analysis, can have an impact on an ideologically driven view of education that, at the time of writing, has been ingrained for more than two decades in England and which may be in place for the foreseeable future. This following section is included in order to consider the

possibility of permeating a hegemonic predilection for quantitative research geared towards validating pre-figured positions.

Consideration of the relationship between academics and policy makers has been the subject of a number of studies in recent years (Ross et al, 2003; Furlong and Oancea, 2006; Sylva et al, 2007) all of which point to the desirability of dismantling the linear nature of relationships between the two sides in favour of a collaborative dialogue that feeds each other's understanding in a reciprocal way (Pollard, 2007). Sylva et al (2007) point to their own longitudinal study along with a small number of other examples, as living proof of the fact that power does heed research. As authors of a long-term longitudinal study, it is unremarkable that, in terms of both the relationship between researchers and academics, as well as between policy makers and any other body, Sylva et al advocate long-term commitment – and it is clear that there are successful episodes that appear to validate this approach. But what is the extent to which policy makers are genuinely open to the findings of even these researchers?

Sylva et al propose unambiguously that despite their own success, educational research at the start of the new century was subject to the valid criticism that such research had failed to 'have a serious impact on either policy or practice' (156). Their analysis concentrates almost exclusively on criticisms raised by commentators about the quality of research rather than the receptivity of policy makers. The ideology and practice of these latter is given as an immovable – a judgement borne out when one looks at the actions of the coalition government in the weeks following its installation. For all its talk of radical reform and the establishment of various freedoms, the new government espoused all aspects of inspection, publishable data and league tables that characterised policy since the 1988 Education Reform Act. Is it credible that researchers could penetrate this hegemony? This question forms the starting point for the current debate within the academy about the strategy that researchers should adopt in order to earn a hearing from power. I would argue that in the current political and economic climate, qualitative researchers face a continuing battle for acceptance by power and that,

significantly, this is probably irrespective of the sound nature and academic probity of their research.

Some commentators remain determinedly sanguine that such a hearing can still be granted to qualitative researchers, notwithstanding the historical struggle of non-positivists to be given audience and credibility by power (House, 2005). Furlong and Oancea (2006) acknowledge the nature of this struggle for acceptance, recognising that the misgivings about educational research identified in Chapter 7 (Hargreaves, 1996; Hillgate et al, 1998; Tooley and Darby, 1999) and suggesting that these should be addressed through the construction of a discourse around enhancing the robustness and reliability of educational research. That one of the principal impetuses for so doing is to meet the requirements of apparatus designed to regulate and scrutinise academic research – the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE – since reformulated under the title of the Research Excellence Framework) - should be considered telling in itself. Beyond this understandable tactic of apparently sensible survivalism, the authors articulate the view, central to the success of their argument, that relationships with power can be built upon this push to embrace academic credibility. Advocating a greater accountability on the part of researchers themselves, they recognise that there can be a concomitant resistance on the part of these researchers to what could be deemed to be 'marketization' and too great a concentration on a pragmatic approach to 'what works.' The solution lies in what they envisage as 'a new contract for social research' (Furlong and Oancea, 2006:6) endowed with credibility through its commitment to quality and reliability on the part of researchers.

The formulation of such a new social contract, which is fundamental to such a proposition and which is also central to Furlong's later work with Lawn (Lawn and Furlong, 2009), envisages such a contract in the terms advocated by Demeritt (2000) who talks of the need to 'diagnose the tacit social and political commitments behind the reform of government research policy and thereby help correct them' (Demeritt, 2000:326). If such an arrangement may have seemed feasible in England even some time into New Labour's time in office,

as a working practitioner I gained no sense of receptivity to such a notion. (Academics with, apparently, short political memories may have chosen to ignore the resonance of the phrase from Britain's earlier attempt at establishing a social contract, Labour's ill-fated *In Place of Strife* in 1969, which was almost universally condemned as 'the most divisive attempt at legislation for 35 years' (Perkins, 2002)). The policy drive and the ideological confidence of a later New Labour administration and its successors, the effect of which was to entrench marketization, seems to render any optimism about a different form of social contract as misplaced.

The survivalist approach advocated by these commentators merits close analysis, not least because of the way in which it mirrors the same survivalism that is so manifest in schools and is recognisable in the comments of respondents in this study. The argument here appears to presuppose that there exists a lack of epistemological confidence within parts of the educational research community to act in an intellectually autonomous way. This, it is suggested, stems from the erosion of a disciplinary approach to educational research which can be located, in its turn, in the neo-liberal assault on education policy – the search for effectiveness, outcomes and what works. Lawn and Furlong (2009) also characterise this dwindling of intellectual autonomy as a corollary of an ageing generation of researchers for whom a more open and enlightened – and, indeed, certain – approach has gradually diminished since the publication of the Robbins Report (1963) which was the 'last full expression of liberal higher education (seeing) university education in more than just instrumental terms' (Lawn and Furlong, 2009:542) and which looks, in the present circumstances, unlikely to be regenerated. Such fears, expressed in 2009, look to have even more substance when one examines, for example, the plans for the training of teachers with the commitment to in-house provision and the sidelining of university education departments referred to in earlier chapters. The importance of acknowledging and recognising topical constraints is captured in the observation that:

> Accountability has meant greater government specification of research
> topics and methodologies than in the past, with the prioritising of certain

sorts of research that can provide evidence directly to ministers: large scale evaluation studies, school effectiveness studies; and a renewed interest in the economics of education with a narrow focus on 'rates of return.' (Lawn and Furlong, 2009: 548)

What appears to characterise the arguments of those who remain sanguine about the forging of a new social contract between researchers and policymakers is an understanding of the reach of neo-liberal hegemony concomitant with, if not accepting of, its precepts. Put more starkly, the argument begins and ends with a concession, albeit an understandable one, to surviving within the constraints of a system as it currently exists.

Lawn and Furlong choose, quite specifically, to refuse to criticise such approaches. However, if the premise of the argument is that there is an epistemological crisis of confidence, it seems strange to be so relaxed about an acceptance of such preconditions for the prosecution of educational research. Further to this, an acknowledgement of the central influence of the RAE would also seem to underline the importance of playing by someone else's rules – rules which require a demonstration of methodological quality above epistemological and pedagogical validity. Hammersley (2008) articulates the falsity of such a position when he identifies the unsatisfactory nature of a simply legitimising 'policy as 'what is required by circumstances,' since this lapses into a form of thinking and writing that obscures the nature of the decisions being taken' (2008:750).

Hammersley goes as far as to characterise such actions as collusion – and if the term may seem to some to be somewhat colourful, the effectiveness of entering into a contact of any sort begs the question of who sets the terms and what are the anticipated outcomes for both parties? The very fact that some of the research projects identified above were themselves funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), itself a recipient of significant funding from the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (ERSC, 2011:27), is an illustration of potential inequality of influence. An immediate

effect of this could, ironically, play out by undermining the independence and autonomy of researchers and academics themselves. Hammersley notes that:

> At stake here are the efforts of policymakers to exert increased control over the work of professionals in the public sector, with the research being treated as a means of achieving this, because it can be used to challenge appeals to professional expertise. (2008:750)

What we have here, therefore, is the potential for power first to be able to set the agenda for areas of research through the control of funding, or even to regulate the continued possibility of university based educationalists to maintain the tenure that would facilitate engagement in such research. Further to this, once projects have been undertaken, researchers need to be cognisant of current policy imperatives. The effect of all of which is to contribute to the diminution of the very epistemological autonomy which they wish to preserve. In a comment that has striking relevance for this study, Hammersley warns that 'attempts to render educational research accountable parallel the reforms that have been carried out within the school system. What has happened there…is a deprofessionalisation of teachers' (2008:759).

Above all, the argument that academic robustness and an eye for what is of concern to policy makers will ingratiate academics and educational professionals to those in power and, as a consequence, validate expertise and knowledge, is a combination of defeatism and naivety. It chooses to ignore the political reality of the times and, indeed, of previous decades and fails to recognise the combination of populism, ideology and political zealotry that has driven the neo-liberal agenda, particularly in terms of education policy-making since the late 1970s.

By way of an illustrative example of the discussion above, proceedings of the Department for Education Conference in 2010 (DfE, 2010e), which focussed on development for educational researchers, are instructive. The event was originally called for late April in the same year by the department's predecessor, the Department for Children, Schools and Families, which

postponed the meeting until after the election in May, by which time both the title of the event and its purpose had been altered. Originally proposed as a 'development day for education researchers *working in universities'* (my emphases) it had become a 'development day for education researchers in the UK' – mirroring a perceptible shift away from university involvement in the new government's announcements on its website. The purpose of the original conference was to help researchers improve 'the reach of your research and opportunities for impact of research on policy and practice.' This became reduced to 'supporting better use of research by practitioners and policy staff.' The starkness of this revised intention became clearer as the conference progressed.

A senior social researcher at the DfE expressed the unequivocal view that qualitative data would not be particularly welcome, alerting those present to the requirement to produce quantitative data that clearly identified an impact on standards. The Deputy Director of 14-19 education, was equally clear that research that challenged or interrogated the current ideological position was unlikely to be treated with any seriousness. Prior to these observations, team leaders from the Education Standards Directorate explained unambiguously that all research submissions undergo initial scrutiny for economic implications. Silverman (2006:35) observes that 'governments favour quantitative research because it mimics the research of its own agencies' and this appears to be validated by a clear emphasis on the need to produce quantitative research that produces data demonstrating a measurable effect on standards – in this case echoing House's observation that 'if an educational program (sic) enhances test scores, the amount of increase is the focus….regardless of the personal costs of obtaining the gains' (House, 2005:1074).

Given this clear operational decision which is, in itself, the reflection of an ideological one, where might be the place for a qualitative study demonstrating teachers' dislike and, indeed, distrust of such an agenda? The impenetrability of policy referred to above, and echoed in all of the early actions of the coalition government, rejects the notion of an interrogation of

the apparatus of proof and measurement. At the level of policy it will lack influence or impact.

As a final observation in this discussion about the credibility of research of any sort in the estimation of those in power, it is worth revisiting the earlier argument about the diminution of considerations of curriculum to somewhat narrower concerns about 'standards' (Chapter 3). In summary, much of that argument takes Alexander's (2004) critique of a 'what works' agenda, placing that, in turn, in a continuum from Simon's (1981) concerns about the degradation of pedagogy in England and borrows from Apple's (1975, 1981, 2004) theorising of the curriculum as an ideological construct. It is in this very notion of 'what works' that the crystallisation of the argument about research is located and this is nowhere more clearly revealed that in the work of Slavin (2002, 2004, 2006) in the US. A major authority on evidence-based education policies (Thomas and Pring, 2004), Slavin writes confidently – and colourfully – about the way in which education research has trailed in the wake of other fields because of its reluctance to accept the apparently incontestable sound sense of the need to 'focus on replicable programs (sic) and practices' (Slavin, 2002:11). When challenged about the reliability, much less the desirability, of making this replication one of the major cornerstones of policy, he is characteristically robust in his rebuttal of criticism:

> If one believes, as I do, that research in education has an obligation to answer the 'what works' questions that educators, parents, and policymakers ask, then our job is to produce answers that are well justified. (Slavin, 2004:27)

Although expressing some reservations about the George W. Bush government's *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) initiative, Slavin applauds its apparent commitment to evidence based policy, marking it as a welcome break with what he believes to be slovenly practices that have meant that 'at the dawn of the 21st century educational research is finally entering the 20th century' (2002:15). Tellingly, in the same paragraph, Slavin acknowledges that new funding will be needed to implement such research-based policy.

Some four years later he is bemoaning the fact that this new dawn has not occurred and testily offers the advice to 'next time, use what works' (Slavin, 2006). His irritation stems from witnessing the downward spiral of adequate yearly progress (AYP) in US public schools – a trend that continues still (Center on (sic) Education Policy, 2011) and which stems from the unwillingness of Bush's government to fund the scheme adequately. (The fate of the *Every Child Matters* initiative in the UK, established in the wake of NCLB, and now cursorily side-lined on government websites, is an interesting parallel).

Two thoughts occur here. First, in his espousal of the 'what works' approach as a way of attempting to talk to power, Slavin – and some of those commentators referred to above – acknowledge the need to gain audience. I am not suggesting that there is anything obsequious or unprincipled about this; as Slavin and others all acknowledge, there is a futility in any educational research that does not have the interests and needs of, in this case, children and young people at its heart and it this that certainly drives their actions. Similarly, research that is shoddy and faddish cannot, and should not, expect to be taken seriously by power and it is incumbent on researchers to manufacture such water-tightness. However, there is no escaping the fact that by accepting an agenda set by others, such commentators and researchers are undoubtedly acting in a political way through their acceptance of such epistemological and ontological outlooks. Second, the adoption of such a political stance, adopted either willingly or unwillingly, wittingly or unwittingly – and I suspect it is the latter in both cases – continues to leave policy makers largely untroubled and able to follow the ideological agenda outlined earlier. Constrained only by these ideological considerations and, most crucially, economic conditions, policy makers can choose to espouse or ignore as such conditions dictate. The 2008 economic crash and the current pervasive discourse of the need for spending cuts and austerity create even more room for the exercise of such selectivity when it comes to taking note of educational research. In the light of all of this, it would appear that power may care little for the views of the respondents in this study or, rather more starkly, those of anyone to whom it is not inclined to listen at any given time.

11.3   Has the market won? Is resistance possible?

Given so much of what is written above, does it become impossible to contemplate resistance to the hegemony of the market? I would argue that, fortunately, the data from the main interview responses indicate that marketization has not completely extinguished the conceptualisation by teachers of a curriculum that does more than serve the needs of the topical policy agenda. Despite the imperative of meeting the needs of the standards' agenda, parts of the profession may still harbour views that, in different circumstances, could challenge the status quo. The balance of forces, however, still weighs heavily on the side of the normalisation of a system perpetually cognisant of the force of the market and one that, in England, is endorsed unreservedly by the current government (Morris, 2010). As outlined in Chapter 6, this is exemplified nowhere more clearly that in the coalition government's commitment to the academies programme. The aping of wider societal marketisation seen in the establishment of chains of academies, whose headteachers enjoy payment at higher market rates than elsewhere in the industry (Shepherd, 2011) is a clear example of this. That this privileging of an apparent spirit of enterprise is, paradoxically, funded through the channelling of tax payers' money (Mansell, 2011) is an inconvenient truth that fails to surface in the ideological drive to promote academies. In the months from the election of the coalition government until the time of writing this section in winter, 2012, the website of the Department for Education featured, on every day without exception, various news items extolling the virtue of the move to academy status. The rise in the number of conversions to academy status rose 30 fold during 2011, albeit that there appears to be little ideological commitment from school leaders more concerned about financial survival than an endorsement of government policy (Tickle, 2011). In a further reinforcement of the centrality of market forces, the proposals for the training of teachers discussed in Chapter 6 (DfE, 2011a) are developed in the implementation plan in November, 2011 (DfE, 2011c) and, significantly, the documentation makes 19 references to incentives in terms of bursaries, six further mentions of financial incentives and none to pedagogical or theoretical

knowledge. In summary, it appears to be the case that neo-liberal ideology continues to hold sway.

Academic commentators, such as those cited immediately above and in Chapter 4 (Sachs, 2003; Evetts, 2005; Furlong and Oancea, 2006) posit ideas that are little more than vague expressions of hope of the emergence of some form of organised resistance. To paraphrase Marx, this is not surprising: the job of academics is to interpret the world, not necessarily to change it. That is not to dismiss all such commentary as nothing more than detached observation. Bottery and Wright (2000) are clear that any effective resistance requires those in education to 'participate in the issues that affect educational policies' acknowledging that 'this will mean becoming more informed on the forces at work in society that are steering education' (Bottery and Wright, 2000: 484). Harris (2007) recognises that academics should be duty bound to formulate programmes of resistance, albeit that these are framed in the terms of the ways in which the academy can reorganise and re-orientate itself without any concomitant recognition of any need to act in concert with the wider world. The academic world is able to theorise resistance but is largely ill-suited to its execution.

One possible explanation for this current unwillingness to engage in discussion about the practicalities of resistance may reside in a consideration of the nature of such struggle in a post-crash world. Hall and Massey (2010) in their analysis of the crisis – and the language of crisis - look to the possibilities of such potential resistance and recognise that the traditional institutions of leftist parties and trade unions now vie for allegiants, in their opinion, with the emergence of new social movements drawing from a variety of preoccupations and interests. Such organisations range from green and environmental groups to small, local manufacturers and could possibly form 'an alliance stitched together through common interests against the nexus of politics, philosophy and economics that we've had for the last thirty to forty years' (Hall and Massey, 2010:10). One might justifiably ask whether or not this is anything more than yet another expression of hope that is little more than the vague 'generative politics' of which Sachs speaks or the new social

contract referred to above. How and where might such a coalition of resistance be 'stitched' together?

Hall and Massey write in the Spring of 2010, some eighteen months after the first impact of the 2008 stock market crash and at that time, as now, they fully acknowledge the impossibility of predicting outcomes which, in their view, may 'even (result in) a revolutionary resolution' (2). At that time the events now characterised as the Arab Spring had not occurred – a sequence of events that were notably referred to by mainstream media as 'revolutionary'. Although the green coalition about which Hall and Massey speculate has not materialised, the emergence of the international Occupy movement (Chomsky, 2012) represents a departure from the actions and activities of the traditional organisations of oppositional tendencies, often acting in a spontaneous way that is not reliant on the hierarchical and, in their own view, sluggish structures of old. Traditional bodies have not, however, been inactive: in 2011 public service trade unions took industrial action on a scale unprecedented in recent decades – with teachers being central to such action. The argument here is not that, after Marx, we are on the verge of the act of emancipation being the act of the working class itself. Nor is it to suggest that a flurry of essentially defensive episodes of industrial action to protect pension arrangements is a new dawn of teacher consciousness on a par even with the 1993 defence of the curriculum referred to in Chapter 1. What it may suggest is that the residual idealism revealed in the interviews with the 22 teachers in this study may yet have a resonance and echo at a time when, to return to Eagleton's (2011) earlier observation, the credibility of capitalism is being seriously interrogated for the first time in decades. For Marxists the timing, nature and extent of resistance and, ultimately, revolution are the source of both fierce debate and, from political opponents, a good deal of incredulous criticism – and such critics become even more sceptical when the unpredictability of such events is mentioned. When Marx talks of the 'material productive forces of society enter(ing) into contradiction with existing relations of production' (Marx, 1959) and of this being the precursor to profound change in the form of social revolution, such critics may well be allowed their disbelief. To reiterate – but not, I hope, to overstate the argument here - there

remains within society, notwithstanding the hegemonic reach of neo-liberalism and its policies, the enduring possibility of resistance. In broad terms this exists in an emergent discourse referred to by Eagleton above and captured as well in Chomsky's observation that addressing inequality on a global scale is 'now almost a standard framework of discussion….(which) expose(s) the heartlessness and inhumanity of the system' and which ' offer meaningful solidarity to those being crushed by it' (Chomsky, 2012:13). In more parochial terms in relation to England's teachers it may mean campaigns to prevent schools becoming academies or industrial disputes over the nature of professional duties. In 2011 in the UK, ten times as many workers took industrial action than in the previous year and this figure of over one and half million is significantly higher than in any of the previous 20 years; four times as many days were lost to strike action than in the previous year and this was more than any year in the twenty year period prior to 2011 – and of those taking action, education workers were the largest single constituency (Office for National Statistics, 2012). From such ruptures in the relations of production the possibility of resistance, however remote, remains extant.

11.4   Reflections on the study and its findings

11.4.1   Critical research

Critics of this approach are clear about their reservations. Such criticism resides in a belief that it is the place of the researcher to be dispassionate and objective in the search for truths. When conducting research which can be seen to be driven by a view of the world that is informed by a political and ideological agenda, it is argued that such neutrality is unachievable. However, the theoretical basis of this study reflects an ontological view that begins by recognising that social facts have a political and ideological provenance. Not to acknowledge this is, in the view of this writer, to confine research to mere interpretation and understanding of current conditions without, possibly, the hope of some amelioration as a consequence. Put more bluntly, research informed by the paradigm of a critical approach asks not just what could be

done to improve conditions but attempts to disclose why such conditions have arisen in the first instance. The teachers at the centre of this study made little comment about a requirement for more technique or a greater emphasis on method to improve their working lives or, indeed, the test results of their students. The world as it is remains too much with these practitioners for them to be able to lose sight of what outcomes are demanded from them and to what sort level. What the research reveals is an acknowledgement of the forces ranged against teachers that prevents the exercise of an autonomy that could challenge current hegemony. This study problematizes systems not standards. Ultimately, one either accepts this approach to research as valid and worthwhile or one does not: it requires little perspicacity to conclude why it is so inimical to the preoccupations of power.

11.4.2   Potential future developments arising from the findings

The study confines itself to an examination of teacher autonomy in England. This is not to argue that the impact of neo-liberal policy as it affects provision of education in this country is unique, albeit that the mechanics of its implementation differ from that of the rest of the United Kingdom. Chapter 5 examines the superstructural manifestation of neo-liberal policy and describes the way in which hegemony about educational thinking had become completely normalised– or, to borrow, from the Gramscian notion – how such thinking had been saturated by an array of forces. Certainly, this normalisation was due largely to the way in which those around the New Right seized opportunities left open, as they saw it, by some failed progressive experiments coinciding with an energetic and confident set of influential individuals and their advisers (Green, 1991). This superstructure, characterised by Jones (2008b:58) as the 'political imaginary' – a hinterland of 'memories, tradition, critique, desire' - along with a willingness to embrace educational reforms earlier than its international counterparts (see Chapters 3 and 4) means that the entrenchment of neo-liberal policy and the extent of its impact is more profound in England than elsewhere - and this also includes the experience of its immediate geographical neighbours. When this already

normalised situation was bolstered by the zeal of New Labour for reform and improvement, and when this occurred after a period of weak trade union resistance from both teachers' organisations and the wider labour movement (Jones, 2008b; Berry, 2009), it is unsurprising that there is some singularity about England's position in this respect. The global impact is well documented and recognised (Cuban, 2004; Harris, 2007; Jones, 2007; Jones and Hatcher, 2008; Fitzgerald and Rainnie, 2011) and the central part played by the world's finance markets in apportioning funding has been touched upon earlier. Although acknowledged as a reflection of a dominant ideology that plays out with international repercussions, the global context forms an unexplored background to this study.

The speed of events in terms of current legislation as it affects England was outlined in Chapters 6 and 8. At the end of the first round of interviews in July, 2010 respondents were largely unaffected by the drive towards conversion to academy status; a year and a half later just over half of the respondents' schools had either converted or were in the process of so doing. The growth of commercial chains running and administering academies continues apace and legislation to encourage regional pay flexibilities has become part of governmental discourse. The action of teachers along with other groups of workers to protect pensions continues with no resolution to the dispute in sight. Plans to implement in-house training of teachers continue. The way in which the implementation of the Ebacc manifests itself has yet to be observed. Although any research has to be a reflection of its time and place, the febrile nature of education policy and provision in England in 2012 renders this instance as an even more apposite concern.

Two major potential and inter-related areas for future development present themselves. The tone and tenor of respondents' commentary has a tendency to move between degrees of optimism relating to professional satisfaction with an occupation over which they still have degree of control, howsoever constrained, to an expression of disappointment about the limitations of their autonomy. There is little credibility afforded by respondents to governmental comments about greater freedom yet there remains the prevailing notion –

and one that sits at the very centre of this study – that there has to be more that they can offer. Given that this is the case, it may be considered churlish on the part of this researcher to dismiss the possibilities that in some settings, in the right set of conditions, some teachers may be able to exercise the greater degree of professional autonomy promised in the current set of government proposals. The extent, nature and scope of such developments would be worthy of further research.

The precise circumstances in which this may happen are of crucial interest. Throughout the study the paradoxical notion of an earned autonomy has resurfaced in the comments of both teachers and headteachers. There are indications in their comments that such an autonomy can only be afforded to those whose standing as determined by the audit of favoured quality tags could permit this. This raises a number of questions. Foremost among these is the potentially class-related nature of such autonomy, where it is not difficult to envisage situations in which schools in well-favoured areas, attracting students who will achieve pre-set benchmarks with a degree of comfort, will be afforded freedoms unavailable to those whose principal concern will be the attainment of grades and scores. Such outcomes become crucial to their very survival in a competitive, market-led situation where chains and federations look to expand their influence when schools fall foul of the demands of the system. If we are to believe that greater teacher autonomy is a possibility – and the terms of this remain firmly conditional – then the location, nature and circumstances of its implementation will be of acute interest.

If the possibility exists that teacher autonomy may potentially be experienced by some practitioners in some settings, then the findings of this study assume significance. It has demonstrated that not all teachers have lost sight of a vision of education that goes beyond hegemonic and reductive models characterised by the production of measurable outcomes, despite the significant impact of political, economic and ideological influences on their professional lives. Although it questions whether or not such findings would be genuinely recognised or welcomed by policy makers, the possibilities for

autonomy are enhanced by the fact that acquiescence to current hegemony is not comprehensive.

11.5   Concluding comments

This study began with an anecdote, the purpose of which was to illustrate the way in which a combination of political and economic forces had permeated the daily practice of teachers. The theoretical analysis that followed attempted to contextualise this example of the erosion of teachers' professional autonomy against a background of a dominant discourse of performativity and marketization – themselves manifestations of the reach of a neo-liberal hegemony. From here, a study of teachers and school leaders demonstrated that, although severely constrained in terms of exercising autonomy, teachers retained a sense of education as a liberal humanist project and had not entirely abandoned any sense of the utopian. Ranged against this vestigial hopefulness, a policy ensemble rooted deeply in right-leaning ideology, and validated by current economic imperatives, was identified as having a stifling and constricting effect on the possibility of the pursuance of any such independent decision making by teachers, much less the promulgation of any idealistic agenda on their part. Why is this important?

When writing about the 'soul of the teacher', Ball (1999) cites Mclaughlin (1991) who draws a distinction between the way in which language, values and practices can be absorbed into organisations in a way that can be at the level of reorientation – an absorption of these elements at a routine, operational level – and colonisation, a level which 'involves major shifts in the cultural core of the organisation and all its existing forms of actions and activities' (Mclaughlin, 1991:38). If it is the case that such colonisation has been effected to the point where, to borrow from the opening chapter, the body snatchers have been victorious and the notion of education as a universal emancipatory force, capable of developing human potential in a range of circumstances, has been superseded by marketization and limited to the production of human capital, is there any further point in agonising about this state of affairs?

The answer from the Marxist perspective of this study has to be that there is: interpretation is one thing, attempting to effect change is another. The fundamental question remains for all involved in educational research is 'what - and who - is education for?' Much of what has gone before here identifies the drive towards measurability and the construction of a discourse of standards that has rendered almost anachronistic the alternative, liberal-humanist visions that could provide the counterpoint to neo-liberalism and its reach. Pring summarises much of this neatly in his comment that:

> The language of 'engagement' with a text, of 'transaction between teacher and learner', of 'intrinsic value' of an activity, of 'struggle to understand', of 'personal enrichment' seems inimical to the language of targets and of standardized performance.' (Thomas and Pring, 2004:210)

For the body of teachers in this study, the struggle between their instincts and the demands of a system that affects everything from the perceived success of their institution to their own pay and professional advancement – both of which are, of course, bound up with such a system – have been revealed in their interviews and written comments. Yet for all of the ubiquity of the standards' agenda, a vestigial notion of non-compliance remains alive, albeit that this is sometimes largely an abstract concept as opposed to one that manifests itself concretely. One has to reiterate that this cohort was not cross-sectional but largely represented those committed to, and engaged with, study and professional development and, in terms of the latter category, constitute a very small percentage of their profession. I would argue that despite the bombardment – and I choose the metaphor thoughtfully – of policy initiatives and the anxiety about results and public perceptions, there remains a flicker of optimism that teachers can yet develop a greater autonomy. As a lifelong practitioner, I find this encouraging and a cause for optimism. Were I a policy maker I might, for all my espoused rhetoric of freedom and a new permissiveness, find it marginally alarming.

In Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*, the eponymous inspector unwaveringly exposes the misdeeds of the privileged. He departs with a warning that is a clear reference to both his anguish at humankind's inability to learn from the horror of war and his abiding hope that a better society is still possible. We must, he warns, concern ourselves with each other's welfare: if we fail to do so 'the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish' (Priestley, 1947: 56). The modern teacher has a choice. She can choose to comment on the fiery cadence of this speech; she might invite speculation about its predictive veracity; she could explore the dramatic tension of the moment. Or she could ask the class to spot a metaphor. To do the latter may well meet the needs of a view of learning that itemises, checks and measures at every turn. To choose one of the alternatives speaks of a view of learning and education that could be inspiring and elevating. Whatever the choices made by teachers, this study demonstrates that a sense of this more uplifting vision of education has not been eradicated. The effects of neo-liberal policy have been far reaching and current practice may reflect this, but there is a corner of the teacher's soul that has not yet been entirely snatched.

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Appendix 1: Three extracts from transcripts

Bold type indicates interviewer's comments. Ellipses indicate pauses of more than 3 or 4 seconds. All transcripts are entirely faithful to the respondents' utterances.

Extract 1. Maurice. 33. Male primary school teacher with four years' teaching experience. Interviewed May, 2010.

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Can I explore 'whether I believe it not, that's another thing'?

Well I don't actually believe that this whole thing of levels is a very good way of working out whether I'm a successful teacher or not. Why do I say that? Because there are so many other ways that a teacher can be successful. So let's say the child doesn't make progress in Maths this year. So in …the way it works at the moment is that you are deemed as a teacher as a failure because your child was in your class all year and didn't make progress. First of all, within one level in one subject, there's different parts; second of all, there could be a child who's had a very…there was a child in my class who was emotional unstable. He had a very emotionally unstable year, so I've been extremely successful, because every other class haven't been, but because he hasn't made that certain level of progress, I'm still deemed to be unsuccessful; on paper it doesn't look like I've been successful.

So there's a real rift between what you might regard as success, getting this kid to do anything, right, and what an outside body might consider to be a success?

Yes, and the Government…forget about one sub-level; you've got to show two sub-levels. And it doesn't make any difference if the child's very bright, and a child's not…he's special needs, because in the experience of our teacher training and including myself, if there are special needs, the maximum

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move one sub-level, and if they are very bright, they can move a whole level. Now I want to say something to you which is controversial, but I'm going to say it anyway.

Lovely!

Now this is something which is…goes along my school but I do it myself. To do with levels. The Government have said, supposed to move two sub-levels, so they're supposed to move from 3C let's say to 3A over a whole academic year. If you have moved two sub-levels, you are successful. If you move one sub-level, then you can get away with it. If you haven't moved at all you're in trouble. What happened to me, I've got a child in my class who's moved more than one level, more than two sub-levels; three sub-levels, so…or he's moved after two terms two sub-levels. What do I say to myself? I've got this child who's moved two sub-levels; I don't need to push him to make any further progress. So I leave him alone because I've got to work on this other person who's made one sub-level and I've got to show …work on him; forget about the other pupil. That's the first thing I do. Which I think basically means the Government are creating a system to create progress. I'm not the only teacher that does it but I definitely do this because I've got to show…the Head Teacher will be happy because he doesn't know any different, and everyone else will say…everyone else is happy with me, so…Ofsted's happy with me, so you know, why do I have to be upset with myself? The next thing I do is , which is total, utter…is a lie; I still do it. I know that I'm probably teaching my class next year.

I'm only laughing because I have heard these stories before, so please don't think I'm being rude, and I'm enjoying the stories too.

I know I'm teaching my Year 5 next year. Even if I wouldn't be, I know my Year 5 teacher's going to have the same problems, they've got to, the class make two sub-level progress is very difficult. So why do I worry? I've got a pupil who moved from 3C to 4C. 3C to 4C. But why do I have to make it harder for the next teacher to make him…change to 4C then he's got to go

into 4B, so I'm going to put him down to 3A. Doesn't look bad. He's a 3A in my class. He's really a 4C. I just say teacher assessment, and then what happens is the next teacher brings him up, and he's only estimating move one sub-level because he's already moved up one sub-level. So that shows he's been successful. Which means they're still flawing the system because yes, we're not pushing…yes, we've made sure the kids moved two sub-levels, but if they move more, I'm not going to show it because I want to make sure that the next teacher's going to be successful, or if I teach him next year I'm going to be successful. So again, the Government have brought in a system to make sure every child matters, and it's working the opposite. It's a game. It's become a game and it's become a serious game because teachers have got this fear of results, Ofsted and, you know, so that's where this level comes in…this levelling, the falsehood of this levelling comes in.

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Extract 2. Jackie. 29. Secondary science teacher with four years' teaching experience. Interviewed November 2010.

*****

So all the pressures that you in particular talked about in your first interview will still be there.

Well it's the drivers isn't it? What's driving you at the moment, you know, as soon as you walk into a classroom, you know, and there's the driving of…you want the kids to do well. Well why do you want the kids to do well? And I know that when I have an observed lesson, it's sort of a bit box-ticky, and…oh that was another thing that actually came in with observations. They talked about…a guy from New York who'd done one of the schools, said that you had to have the inspection system set up straight away, and he said…and actually, it wasn't just inspection. He talked about feedback. He said it's <u>so</u> important that you have feedback to these schools, and it was very much a levelling exercise, but you needed that…well he didn't use levelling he said feedback, but you need all of that in place before the school is actually up and running so you can go in, you can check them, you can ensure that they're doing well and if you have sort courage to shut down the school if it's not.

Which is interesting, because that's what the New York guy talked about. And then they had a bit of conversation in the middle, you know, two, three minutes of conversation, and then they want back to Michael Gove and said what have you got set up? Who's going to look at it, and he said…oh, Ofsted, OK? Even though at the beginning they said that there was no specific inspection programme for these schools, he goes, oh but it'll be Ofsted, and you know, almost as if it came under the same remit as normal schools…normal state schools. Kind of went, there's nothing different there to begin with, OK? It's all the same. And then he didn't talk about feedback, he talked about rigorous inspection. And I thought…but that's not what the guy from New York said. The man from New York running this system said feedback. Kind of, which in my head is hand-holding, ongoing improvement…if you were talking to a kid it'd be AFL, wouldn't it?

Evaluation?

Yeah, so for the kids, this would be assessment for learning inspection, and what Michael Gove appeared to be talking about, now I haven't spoken to him personally, I'm only interpreting his words, but what he was talking about was summative assessment, so we say how important AFL is to the kids, we…this man from New York was talking about the importance of inspection but essentially along AFL lines, and the thing that Michael Gove took away from that was we need rigorous summative assessment that's essentially the same as the summative assessment we have in our everyday schools.

It's really interesting. You went off on that, again, charming little rantette, saying that when you go into your classroom, the driver is (a) I want these kids to understand what I'm talking about, but what …I got the impression there was another driver there as well, because we were talking about results weren't we?

Results, yes, targets…target driven. At the end of the year they look at my residuals for my classes….

Residuals keep cropping up…

And you say OK, how did your class do compared to everybody else? In a kind of is it you type problem. So while you want the kids to do well, do you want the kids to do well for themselves, which is really what it's all about, isn't it? Why don't…teach them to make my…targets look good and my, you know, I teach them because hopefully at the end of it they leave with a love of Science or knowledge about Science, or the ability with what they've done to go on and get a job, you know, even if it's just a C at GCSE, then it counts towards them being able to apply for things, or if they want to go on and do A Level they need the B or above, and you know, you're aiming for those targets so that they have life choices, and that's not to say that later on, if they don't get the C or they don't get the whatever, then you know, they can't do it; it just makes it a lot harder for them.

Of course, so the structure…

But that's not…we sort of talk about that, but in a way it's kind of lip-service, because when it comes down to it, it's about what you get isn't it?

You're giving me again, and with practically every interview, I want it on video rather than audio; you were giving me a conspiratorial stare there, aren't you? You're saying at the end of the day, it's about what they get.

Yes. So I mean that's what it all comes down to.

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Extract 3. Maria. 50s. Assistant Headteacher secondary school with 27 years' experience.

*****

That's the constant driver, and I understand that. Is that what you would like the constant driver to be?

I think it's…it is definitely important that each child, you know, maximises their potential and does well, but it's the whole development of the child really, you know, the social and spiritual and cultural development is just as important, so…they leave school as well-rounded individuals. But everybody wants the results now. The pupils want it; a lot of our pupils are brought into this culture of learning and they want to do really well; stay on in the sixth form and go on to University. Nobody leaves now…the other thing I think that's changed. Everybody progresses now into Further Education.

Can I be really picky with you?

Yes

Because this has come out…came out actually in an interview I did yesterday evening. Everybody's into this culture of learning, you say. If I were to play Devil's advocate, do you not mean everybody's into this culture of acquiring results?

Mmm…yes, although hopefully they enjoy what they're doing and enjoy their learning as well, but it is results driven, yes. Especially at Key Stage 4. Key Stage 3 you can be more creative with the curriculum, but Key Stage 4…are they meeting their target grades, are they on target, constant review and evaluation of that.

Do you think they do enjoy it? Remember this is all anonymised.

They enjoy getting the results I think at the end, so I think some of them find it quite tough going. Especially if they've got nine, ten subjects and everyone's demanding work and you know, higher grades from them, so some of them do.

I know you're not being deliberately evasive. You say they enjoy getting the results but…what I really what to know is what their daily experience is like. Are they enjoying that?

They are…I mean…they are enjoying their learning in the classroom, but I think it's the extra pressures on them to do, you know, lots of practice exam questions and having lots of mock papers and you know, sort of constantly going to the wire really, we know that we haven't got any study leave this year for the mocks and so it is quite pressurised.

That's interesting. I know that you're responsible for staff in significant numbers here. Have you any sense of how they feel about that?

They find it tough. They do find it tough, especially, you know, just looking at targets the whole time and making sure they're on track and containing it and the fact that they have to put in so much work and almost spoon feed the kids really to get them through.

Almost spoon feed?

Mmm….yeah.

Hear that….you hear that quite a lot in casual conversation, don't you?

I suppose it does stifle creativity and you teach them to the exam specs really; this is what the examiners are looking for; you can't really go off-course at all.

No, that's interesting. I've had some really interesting conversations with teachers who have wanted to go off-course…again, one of the hundred times that if I ever did this project again, I'd video people. You pulled such a face there when I talked about going off-course.

Because I teach A Level Sociology and we were having a good debate the other day and I had to pull it back because otherwise we're not going to get through, you know for the mock and I would've liked to have shown a film at that point as well and discussed that, but just didn't have time, so …which in the old days, you could, you know.

Appendix 2: Screen-grabs showing examples of coding sheets

Codes A [Compatibility Mode] - Microsoft Excel

	Promo	Presp	Pstan	Pacc	Pcomp	Aearn	Ainstcult	Ahtsmt	Ax	Tsch	Tstand	Tcertdeg	Tx	Eofst	Eobs	Egov	Emedia	Epar	Eres	Edata	Ilgtab
Christine		xxx	x	xx		xxx	x	xx				x		x	xx	xx				x	
Danielle		x	xx						xx	xx	x		x			xx					
Dianne	xx		xx						xxx	x			xx	xx		xxxx			x		
Harry		xx		x					x	x	x	xxx			xx					x	
Helen	xx								x	x		x						x	xxxxx	x	x
Jackie	xx				xx		xxxx	x		xxx	x					x					
Jean			x			x			x		x		x	xxxxx	xx				xxx		
Kim	x	x				x			x		xx		x						x	x	
Laura	xx		x		x						x	x				x	x	xx	x	x	
Leanne		x			x				x		x		x			x	xx		xxx		x
Liam	x			x		x				x	x		x	xx	x	xxx		x			
Maurice		x		x					x		xxxx	x	x			xxx			x	x	x
Martin	x		x	x		x	xxx	x		xx											
Maria		xx		xx			xxx	x		xxx	xx			xxx				x			x
Marsha	x			xx			xx			x		x			x	x			x	x	
Max			xx			xxxx	xxxx														
Melissa		x	xx			x	xxxx	xxx		x					x					x	xx
Malcolm			x	x		x				x	x		x								
Robert	x		x				x			xxx	x		xx	x	x		x			x	
Shona		x		x					x		x	xxx							xxx	xxxx	
Steve			xx			xx	x		x	x									xxx		
Shaun																		x	x	xx	
						xx			xx	xx											

Promo	Role model or example	
Presp	Demonstrating and exhibiting responsibilty	
Pstan	Upholding and maintaining standards, demonstarating knowledge	
Pacc	Being accountable to various stakeholders	
Pcomp	Deficit model cf other professions	
Aearn	The overall concept of earned autonomy	
Ainstcult	Autonomous because of this particular institution - also 'worse elsewhere'	
Ahtsmt	Autonomous because of the actions/protection of HT and/or SMT	
Ax	Not at all autonomous	
Tsch	Trusted 'in this school'	
Tstand	Trusted as long as I 'perform'	
Tcertdeg	Trusted as long as I adhere to plans, SoW and frameworks	
Tx	Not trusted	

Codes [Compatibility Mode] - Microsoft Excel

	FIB	SBFI	MTG	Paradox	Trust	Results	SB	Ofsted	Inspire	AAT	Gramsci	Anecdote	Vignette
Christine	x		xx	x		xx	xxx					Res	looked after child?
Danielle		x	x			x						DS below - empowerment	
Dianne	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		xx			no need lo for g lesson	
Harry	x	x	x	x		xx	xxx			x		Res manipulation	
Helen						xxx	xxxx	x					
Jackie			x	x	x	(x)	(x)				x		
Jean	x		xx	xx		x	xxxxx	xxx		x		risk taking beneficial?	
Kim			x	x		xxx	xx	Obs					
Laura	x	x				x	xx	x	xx			exams	
Leanne	x		xxx	x		xx(x)x			x			panic terror/going back to school Y	
Liam		x	(x)x	x	(x)	xx	(x)x		x			spied on by Tas	
Maurice			xx	xx		x	xxx	xxx				Res manipulation	
Martin											xx		
Maria	x			xx		(x)x	xx				x	A level sociology	
Marsha						xx	x	x			xx		
Max	x	x	xxx	x	x	(x)	x	(Obs)		x		v anti gove!	boost original vignette
Melissa		x	xx	x		x	xxx						
Malcolm		x				(x)							
Robert		x	x	x		xxx	xxx	(Obs)x				The conker story!	
Shona		x	x	xx		x	x	xx				Res manipulation	
Steve			x	x		xx	xxxx	xx(obs)xx		x		Possible chap title	
Shaun			xxxx	x		x	xxxxxx					Too many to mention	

FIB	First interview beneficial in terms of professional development
SBFI	Perfectly happy with first interview - stands by it
MTG	Fundamental and clearly expressed mistrust of current coalition government
Paradox	Identification of the paradox of regulated autonomy
Results	Results agenda still significant in responses
SB	An articulation - not vague feeling - that something better must be on offer
Ofsted	Ofsted still a major driver and consideration
Inspire	See SB - a wish to inspire - the 'Robin Williams' factor
AAT	Autonomy to manage and control - not at classroom level
Gramsci	Social psychological attempts to win people's consent to domination
Trust	Expression of desire to be trusted/feels slightly mistrusted