



## Artificial boundaries? Shaping policy through empowering research

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## Artificial boundaries? Shaping policy through empowering research

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This paper is about the politics of policy knowledge production. It calls for spaces to be forged to allow teachers’ voices to have centre stage in knowledge creation and production. Specifically, this paper discusses the need for alternative ways of conducting educational research so that power in research design is utilised as a capacity for change. First, the politics of knowledge production is explored. The second and most central task of this paper is to highlight the role that teachers’ knowledge can play in shaping education policy through emancipatory research practices. Overall, this paper advocates that the time has arrived for a fresh look at teachers’ participation in the production and validation of knowledge. Valuing teachers’ embodied knowledge and the unique position teachers hold within the education system, this paper is a window on the present, and suggests the direction the conversation should take in order to move education policy beyond the endless accumulation of evidence towards impactful change.

**Keywords:** Education policy; empowering research; exclusion; power; teacher knowledge

### Introduction: the politics of knowledge production

Teachers, power, and their relationship to education policy production are the concepts around which this paper is constructed. This paper seeks to uncover the reasons why teachers’ knowledge and professional judgement are excluded from education policy production. It also highlights the value that teachers’ professional knowledge and judgment could add to education policy in order to move education policy beyond the endless accumulation of evidence. However, this is a difficult task as government involvement in education by way of numerous policy interventions orientates education away from social policy issues towards the needs of the market. In Ireland, this can be seen by the most recent *Action Plan for Education 2019* (Department of Education and Skills 2019), a policy driven by the goals and ambitions as set out in the national *Statement of Strategy 2019–2021* (Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment 2019), which aims to develop policies that ‘power economic and social progress.’ (10). Both policies are housed under the broader strategy of *Project Ireland 2040* (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform 2018), a strategy that claims to do things differently. Education within this framework pledges to make Ireland more economically successful

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as well as increasingly fair, a promise that Apple (2018) cautions us to take a skeptical stance on.

Education, from the perspective detailed above, is infused with the principles of the Global Reform Movement (GERM). This is an acronym-as-analogy term coined by Sahlberg (2011) to describe a phenomenon that is, as the name suggests, malignant, multiplying, and damaging. Described as an ideological 'thought virus' or social movement, the GERM ensures that education systems suitably respond to both globalisation and the knowledge economy (Ellis, Steadman, and Trippestad 2019). It exposes teachers to economic forces, relations and ideologies, such as increasing bureaucracy, regulation, and surveillance (Apple 2018; Brown et al. 2020). The marketisation, managerialism, and performativity of neoliberal education reforms have enabled this GERM to attack the mind, body, and soul of education (Fuller 2019). This includes devaluing teachers' concerns, solidarity, reciprocity, and mutual care (Lynch, Baker, and Lyons 2009). While it is acknowledged that the Irish education system does not subject Irish teachers to as many performative measures or monitoring and control mechanisms as other jurisdictions (Mac Ruairc 2019), future changes to this position remain open (For more, see Skerritt 2019).

Change is 'the "core" business of education' (Biesta 2017, 86), and so policy is almost always about change, about progress, and about doing things differently (Ball 2017). Policy must support and sustain change for the better. However, a sense of uncertainty has emanated from the very policies that are designed to offer certainty (Bauman and Lyon 2013). In other words, progress, once the manifestation of optimism and happiness, now stands for 'relentless and inescapable change' that leaves many in fear of 'being left behind' (Bauman 2007, 11–12; Biesta 2017). For example, the *Action Plan for Education* (DES 2019) uses words and phrases such as 'adaptive and innovative', 'managed and paced' that have a rhythm related to the characteristics of fast-paced agendas. This implies a sense of movement and constant change that is associated with globalisation, the global economy and world cities (Ball 2007, 33). In doing so, these commonly used expressions in education policy generate a sense of disorder and feelings of fear in what might result in unplanned and unexpected side-effects (Bauman 2007). Sociological concepts as well as critical theorists such as Michael Apple, Stephen Ball, Kathleen Lynch, and Jennifer Ozga are used throughout this paper to highlight the increasing feelings of insignificance and powerlessness among teachers, as documented recently in reports by Bruno (2018) and Fleming (2019). This paper poses two key questions: what structures and processes are keeping teachers out of education policy production and why?

### *Defining policy*

Policy is understood in this paper as having two main features. It is a formal document that is constructed within government, as outlined by Ball (2017), and this document is further understood as a process that extends beyond physical pages. . This is because policy involves struggle, contestation, and negotiation of power as it gets reworked and reproduced by the many and varied people who engage in its design and implementation at the local and national level (Ball 2017; Ozga 2000). As a concept, policy has its origins in the Enlightenment era and, as such, propels us away from the inadequacies of the present to the ideals of the future. The promise

and potential that policy holds means that the term itself gets used quite loosely and many specific terms used within policy texts are often slippery and elusive (Ball 2017). In education, policy is primarily understood from an economic viewpoint, underpinned by conservative economic needs that are matched with liberal market tactics (Apple 1996, 2018; Ball 2017; Lynch, Grummell, and Devine 2012). This paper explores the emergence of the global reform movement and what this has meant for teachers. Due attention will be given to the language of policy as a means of actively privileging some and excluding others. This paper seeks to uncover the practices of educational policy that transcend human and non-human environments in innocuous ways and to unearth the tensions that exist in education policy production that creates a disconnect between teachers and their profession.

### **Global education reform**

Global education reform, an educational reform orthodoxy that aligns education goals with market techniques, requires schools to change in two different ways at the same time. On the one hand, a neoconservative process emphasises a return to authority, traditional knowledge and values, standards, and national identity. On the other hand, a neoliberal process extends market-driven principles into all areas of society meaning that schools are required to become more like and to act more like businesses (Apple 1996; Ball 1990, 2007, 2017; Lynch, Grummell, and Devine 2012). By invoking the idealised virtues of a romanticised past, dominant conservative groups within politics and the economy are setting the political agenda in education using liberal market techniques such as competition, efficiency, and measurement. This is what Apple (1996) describes as the hidden hand of hegemonic control. The idealised past promoted by dominant powers coupled with a system of measurement that is performance driven has encouraged a common culture of acceptance, conformitvity and obedience to the prevailing order. In what both Apple (1996) and Ball (1990) term 'conservative restoration', rightist groups have gained the upper hand in education by promoting conditions believed necessary for increasing international competitiveness, discipline, and profit, while at the same time returning to a romantic historical vision of the 'ideal' home, family, and school. The former promotes a strong state, the latter a limited state. A return to traditional standards through 'progressive' market tactics, appears innocuous, neutral, and the right thing to do (Ball 2013; Ozga 2019). Education policy becomes, therefore, a site of competition, competitiveness, and comparison between and across borders. This highlights a key feature of the GERM, which is more competition and less cooperation within and between schools.

### ***Crisis of agency***

Across a borderless policy-scape, global visions for education replace national outlooks. National governments appear to have ceded some of their autonomy to Europe (Grek 2010) all the while allowing a technocratic elite accrue power and influence in education to pursue political agendas. Educational policy is no longer the product of the nation state alone resulting in the re-working of labour relations and constraining of the role of trade unions. This creates what Bauman and Lyon (2013) term a two-tier crisis of agency.

On the upper tier, political agency has been brought ‘perilously close to impotence’ (Bauman and Lyon 2013, 70) as power is now located on a global level, far removed from the territorial politics of the state. The state needs to be flexible to adapt to this arrangement and in doing so favours relationships that are temporary, driven by performance and monitoring, contracts that are malleable and a considerable number of other ‘ethical slippages’ (Ball 2007, 84). This establishes an environment that effectively corrodes any sense of mutual care, community, or solidarity among teachers. It does this by eroding teacher motivation and ability to act, to respond, and to oppose. This not only transforms the conduct of schools and the identities of those within the school (Ozga 2017), but also encourages binary modes of thinking. Binary thinking obscures possibilities for different interests to be negotiated, greatly weakens teacher power and constrains the power of teacher unions (Apple 1996; Ball 2007; Ozga 2017).

On the lower tier, teacher unions must endeavour to provide local solutions to globally produced problems without the power to get things done or the power to secure that the right things are being done. As the professional space for teachers to exercise individual professional autonomy in their classroom is becoming increasingly limited (Day 2020), teacher unions have the almost impossible task of working against larger forces such as accountability, choice and competition, devolution and deregulation, entrepreneurship, privatisation, and targets. The common ground teacher unions once worked upon has been repressed and removed as new relationships and new identities are created, such as client – consumer; manager – managed, and client need – professional judgement. . Allegiances, purposes, and beliefs about teacher unions and all those involved in education have been altered to accommodate new ways of being. This is, on a more optimistic note, an opportunity for teacher unions and professional associations to foster dialogue and debate about democratic conception of accountability, future collective resistance and reimagining the ‘value’ teachers can bring to the processes and practices of measurement (see Ball 2016; Biesta 2017).

### **The knowledge economy**

Education is increasingly viewed in terms of its productive capacity. The ‘knowledge economy’ is a term much used in education policy debate to indicate that information and knowledge are replacing capital and energy as primary wealth – creating assets (Ball 2017). The effect of the knowledge economy is threefold: destabilisation, disinvestment, and commodification (Ball 2007, 2017). Each one has very real implications for teachers. The first two effects, destabilisation or the unrelenting criticism of public services, and disinvestment, which is a series of withering public spending cuts, are evident in the Irish context by means of unequal pay structures tied to a teacher’s first date of appointment to a teaching position (O’Keeffe and Deegan 2018), the removal of longstanding reward schemes or allowances for qualification awards, geographical variance, and teaching in the Irish language (Eurydice 2015), non-permanent/casual contracts, and the increased ratio of pupils to teachers with Irish teachers teaching four more pupils on average per class (INTO 2016). The third key effect is commodification, a subtle process that replaces social relations with exchange relations (Ball 2007) or more generally, how consumer culture becomes embedded in daily lives, totally rewrites the relationship of teachers to teaching.

The term professional becomes synonymous with all that can be measured and rewarded. New roles, new opportunities, and new terminologies present us with new ways of knowing ourselves, our colleagues and what we do (Ball 2016). Teachers are once again classified and divided. Teachers must enthusiastically embrace these changes for fear of being considered against progress, unprofessional, or passé. Pedagogical relations are fragmented and individualised. This places doubt on teachers own abilities, their professionalism, judgement and purpose.

### ***Existing as a teacher***

The history of education policy has been a history concerned with the problem of the population, its management, and its productivity (Ball 2007, 2013, 2017). The idea of the teacher as a passive agent or a ‘secular political pastorate’ (Gordon et al. 1991, as cited in Ball 2013, 29) employing the moral judgements required of a proto-profession, have underpinned knowledge acquisition, creation, and generation as something ‘out there’ beyond the reach of the majority of teachers. Ozga (2019) suggests that this is due to an uneasy relationship between education and research. There are some within the education research community who are not comfortable with the concept of a ‘leading intellectual’, and leading intellectuals are not assumed to be working in education (Ozga 2019). More broadly, there are those within the academy who consider education to be ‘a low status topic of inquiry’ (512). Such beliefs will continue to inform our future if assumptions such as these are left unchallenged. Ball (2013) reminds us of Foucault’s assertion that our present is not the beginning or end of a ‘historical’ process. The past is a period of time ‘like, while at the same time unlike, any other’ (86), for the past is ‘modernity in its past and present forms’ (87). Historically, teachers were ‘trained’ to be moral ambassadors of the state, expected to be ‘virtuous’ rather than ‘over-educated’ throughout the late nineteenth century (Jones 1990; as cited in Ball 2013). Their role was to be state actors who would ensure the morality of the church and the state would be upheld. However, the impact of consumerist attitudes and patterns of conduct on education has meant that moral reflections are no longer necessary. In a world where society is viewed more as a series of networks and less as a structure (Bauman 2007), extrinsic values such as flexibility, transparency and performance outweigh the value that moral reflections once had (Ball 2004, 16). The ‘openness’ of our open society means that individuals become simultaneously the promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote (Biesta 2017). For teachers, professional criticality and reflexivity must be cast aside, and beliefs once held about themselves and their profession must be replaced by an attitude that is driven by performance and external demand.

### ***Professional autonomy***

The structural and individual separation, as well as the internal and external division between teachers’ judgement and market forces, have led to ‘the erosion of responsible, accountable and democratic professionalism’ (Brown et al. 2020, 82). Teachers struggle for authenticity in the means/ end logic of the marketisation of education. This is essentially the history of education policies, described varyingly as division and classification, discipline and regulation, the inclusion paradox (Slee 2011), or

simply the problem of the population (Ball 2013). On the one hand, disciplinary power subjects the teacher, as well as the student and the school, to the gaze of judgement. On the other hand, regulatory power concerns itself with the teaching body and reveals itself through a pattern of practice characterised by classification and division (Ball 2007, 2013, 2017). Combined, this means that teachers must take responsibility for their ‘performance’ and adopt behaviours that support increased managerial control bureaucratic regulations, national teaching standards and external school inspection (Day 2020). In effect, the social act of teaching is erased. Actions are commodified and equate with marketplace value. Stress, illness, and burnout are very often the result for teachers (Ball 2004). However, hope can be acquired in the knowledge that this was not always the case. Up until the 1960s when international organisations began to play an important role in Irish policy production, the state offered funding to agencies of educational services rather than intervene in educational matters directly. This time was the so-called golden era of teacher control where parents were expected to trust the professionals and accept that teachers knew what was best for their children (Whitty 2000), highlighting how events emerge through and from engagement with one another. However, current teacher-state relations have flipped this relationship on its head, whereby the state plays a significant role in teacher status at the local level, controlling the activities that a profession can and cannot carry out. This is a distortion of the democratic dimension of professionalism (Biesta 2017). Teacher autonomy is now located away from the notion of teachers having professional permission to act on behalf of the state in the best interests of its citizens towards a view of teachers needing to be exposed to the rigours of the market.

### **Forging new spaces**

Practice-orientated research, such as action research, is increasingly gaining strength in education research circles (Groothuijsen et al. 2019). Networks such as the Network for Educational Action Research in Ireland (NEARI) and the Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN) enable innovation of teaching, teaching practice, and makes valuable contributions to the theory and methodology of education. The issue remains, however, that research conducted *by* teachers *for* teachers pursues fundamentally different goals and objectives to that of education policies. Each research agenda is located in distinctly different worlds. Teachers’ commitments rest upon social justice issues and have moral purposes (Day 2020), while education policies are, in essence, business opportunities (Ball 2007). It is highly difficult for teachers and teacher research to compete with the global measurement industry and with the wide range of actors with differing vested interests working within policy. A diversity of agents, agendas, and providers, which is favoured by current policy formation, is considered to give energy and creativity to the education system. The idea that administrators and teachers need to look outside the school when educational reform is needed is continually reinforced, squeezing out possibilities for local democratic action.

What ‘works’ in education is considered to be ‘secure scientific knowledge’ (Biesta 2017, 322). The pseudo-security that numbers offer paralyses teachers from acting unless they are certain of and can prove the intended outcome. This tension forges new spaces and new possibilities for teachers and their potential contribution to policy production to be realised. It rests, first, on reimagining the teacher as a



subject and not an object, as an active agent rather than a passive implementor, and as an intellectual with different and complimentary insights to offer policy production (Ball 2016; Biesta 2017). This requires educational researchers to engage in practices that listen to participant voices with ‘soft ears’ or ears that are ‘open to more nuanced understandings and interpretations’, affording researchers a ‘broader framework for better understanding the obvious ...’ (Mazzei and Jackson 2009, 8). The aim of education policy needs to evolve from ‘what works’ to ‘what works for what’ (Biesta 2017, 323), and teachers have a specific contribution to make here. Evidence-based research can only suggest what has worked in the past but not what will in the future. We ‘always need judgement and reflection on how to act’ (Biesta 2017, 323). Teachers working within democratic research designs can forge new spaces for this to happen.

### *Paving a way forward*

Democratic research designs provide a starting point for reclaiming what the education profession is about. This calls for two important shifts to take place. First, interpreting multiple sources of knowledge need guidance from teachers who understand what works and what is useful in practical terms. Second, the rapid growth of knowledge sources, which are based on large data sets, coupled with the expansion of those considered educational advisors and experts, suggests a need to give considerable power to those who can advise, inform and interpret data in meaningful ways. As multiple sources of knowledge and information are widely available, Ozga (2020) believes that the issue of interpretation is of paramount concern. Policy and institutional activity within the field of education is clearly thought about, managed, and researched. Overall, we must question those involved in current policy production: what is their professional background; how have they been selected, and what are their educational and political interests?

### *The cultural role of research*

Biesta (2017) remind us of the cultural role of research as well as the technical role. The cultural role, which is no less practical than the technical role, is a role that assists teachers to acquire a different understanding of their practice and an opportunity to imagine their practice differently. The cultural role informs the technical role and together, should support each other. To begin to understand how teachers might be more active in developing their agency encourages a return to Freire’s (1993) theory of emancipation and specifically to that of consciousness. This theory suggests that the oppressed are submerged in reality, actively accepting the meanings and practices that ‘serve the interests of the oppressors whose image they have internalized’ (Freire 1993, 44). For teachers, they must address the perception of themselves as active contributors to the teaching profession. Teachers’ active contribution to their profession, or teacher agency, is understood here as something that teachers do rather than something they have. Agency can be ecological, encompassing past histories, present requirements, and future directions (Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson 2015). Teacher agency is more than professional judgement; it is an essence that emerges from the interactive interplay between the person and their environment. Within this viewpoint, teachers are positioned at key points of intersection between knowledge production and practical problem-solving.



*The social role of research*

Education research is a significant tool in understanding and ultimately improving education policy and practice. Raising the question between power and method immediately brings to light the question of the social role of research. The social relations of the research act are useful ways to flesh out practical techniques that allow teachers to occupy multiple identities: teacher, researcher, and policy developer among others. To this end, new knowledge can be generated using a research design that is both collaborative and interactive. Maximal reciprocity is an essential element to this process. Maximal reciprocity can be described as creating the necessary conditions to allow all those involved in policy development to critique the space between the personal and the political. In other words, critiquing the space between teachers’ self-understanding with taken-for-granted beliefs as well as the authority that culture has over us is an essential step in this process. Within this nexus lies an opportunity to create a forum to test the usefulness of conceptual and theoretical policy documents. Whilst, this is without doubt a great challenge, it can be achieved through reciprocity. This includes regular and systematic assessments that involve interactive and dialogic discussions; sequential interviews and recycling of description and analysis before conclusions are drawn.

Education research is a significant tool in understanding and ultimately improving education policy and practice. Raising the question between power and method immediately brings to light the question of the social role of research. The social relations of the research act are useful ways to flesh out practical techniques that allow teachers to occupy multiple identities: teacher, researcher and policy developer among others. Methodology is fruitful ground to explore when attempting to address the ways in which power relations shape knowledge production in research. The methodology is viewed as inherently political, as ‘inescapably tied to issues of power and legitimacy’ (Lather 1991, 110). Methods are believed to be loaded with assumptions rendering methods as politically charged as they define, evaluate, control and report. Since power is a relationship that can be exercised from outside inside and from inside outside (Foucault 1980), the goal of research rests upon the distribution of power among the researched using methodological means. Using this as the starting point, Lather (1991) considers how to bring together scholarship and advocacy in order to generate new ways of knowing that interrupt power imbalances? Lather (1991) questions how can the subject become the object of the research endeavour? Aiming to interrupt patterns of dominance, the association between conscious understanding and unconscious dynamics embedded in social relations comes into play. It requires a research stance which is open-ended and ‘profoundly sceptical of appearances’ and ‘common sense’ (Lather 1991, 65). Significantly, Foucault (1977) warned of the violence of a position that sides against those who are happy with dominant discourse and prevailing thought.

*Policy making that empowers*

A primary concern of educational discourse on new formations in policy making that can empower teachers is the question of how to generate knowledge in ways that can turn critical thought into emancipatory action. A number of critical theorists

and researchers have suggested that researchers should engage in research not only to produce knowledge but also to make positive change in the lives of those who participate in research (e.g. Gitlin and Russell 1994; Lather 1986, 1991). In other words, participants come to realise their own power within their specific context, which allows them to identify and articulate changes for themselves.

A number of positive collaborative relationships between researchers and classroom teachers have been described in the literature (e.g. Alvermann et al. 1997; Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993; Gitlin and Russell 1994). However, less has been written about the transformative potential of emancipatory research designs in shaping the educational political landscape differently. Empowering research designs reconceptualise the very notion of power, suggesting alternative ways of conducting research so that power is utilised as a capacity for change. These designs, which include but are not limited to critical; educative; feminist; Freirian participatory action research; neo-Marxist and praxis-oriented, have huge potential for sustainable change. In Ireland, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) extended an invitation to teachers, and other stakeholders, to become involved in redeveloping Ireland's *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA 2020). Networks, consultation days and other structures were established to encourage teachers to act, to debate, and to discuss. For those concerned with doing research in an unjust world and moving education policy beyond a stagnant position towards the direction of long-term, sustainable social transformation, this involvement is welcomed and encouraged. However, the capacity of teachers to generate change at a deeper more systematic level remains to be seen.

#### *Emancipation in practice: social justice issues*

Democratic research designs encourage an ability to act. They are reciprocal and resonate with people's lived experiences. An initial step of democratic research designs is to develop an understanding of the world view of the participants. This requires conducting research in a non-elitist and non-manipulative manner. It means providing insights into the research design, sampling procedures and responsibility towards participants. The attention given to relationships with participants illustrates the goals of critical science research to be '*for*' rather than '*on*' people. This perspective encourages an ability to act, laying the foundations for sustainable and long-term change. This is the antithesis to how global measurement industries such as PISA operate as they neglect local capacity, needs, resources, and skill sets. It also raises important questions about social justice issues and education policy within the education community.

Issues such as democracy, decolonising education, human diversity, inclusion, LGBTQA+, mindfulness, racism, social justice, sustainability, and technology are rarely spoken to directly when addressing education policy production, despite profoundly shaping education policy and practice. This is due, on the one hand, to the hegemonic rhetoric used in policy documents such as 'we', 'all', and 'us', which promote the progressive sounding ideals of 'sameness', 'oneness', and 'us'. This allows specific forms of knowledge to emerge, to be considered credible, and become accepted as 'truth'. On the other hand, the pattern of practice of education policy production, namely classification and exclusion, renders dominant forms of knowledge acceptable and certain practices unquestionable. Boundaries are reworked

and teachers are simultaneously classified and excluded. Dominant powers engage in this practice, a practice described by Apple (2018) as negative selection, whereby keeping things out is just as important as letting things in, in order to maintain current power positions. Teachers’ understandings and knowledge would result in compromise and threaten the overall control of this space of conflict.

Two techniques in policy production, disciplinary and regulatory power (Ball 2013), play an important role in how social justice issues for teachers emanate from policy and play out in schools. Disciplinary power focuses on the behaviour of individuals and regulatory power focuses on the population or larger ‘body’. The interrelationship between religion, race, and education is an example of disciplinary and regulatory power made possible by policy in Ireland. The overwhelming majority of primary schools are under the direct or indirect, control and/or ownership of the Roman Catholic Church (Devine 2011; Fahie 2017). Irish schools have a right to retain a particular religious ethos, legally enshrined in the Education Act (1998), which raises questions about diversity, religious rights, and racial discrimination. In fact, the professional identity and practice of LGBTQA+ teachers working in denominational schools are often (in)formed by fear and discrimination and many remain sensitive to the publicly supported attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality (Fahie 2017). Solutions to education problems are often sought in changes to governance. In relation to diversity of primary provision in Ireland, the Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn (2014-2014) emphasised ‘the importance of education outcomes’, that ‘our schools can be busy places’, and schools must ensure that they ‘are as welcoming and as inclusive as possible to all pupils of all backgrounds, beliefs and nationalities’ (DES 2014, 2–3). The debate on this topic has grinded to a halt impacting on all within the education community. This could be described as efforts to deconstruct collectivism and return to a *laissez-faire* attitude of individualism. It can also be read in relation to what Bauman and Lyon (2013) describe as the invisible power to describe who and what I am? It is ‘a part of knowledge whose sharing with others is refused or prohibited and/or closely controlled’ (23). This, in turn, challenges and changes what it means to be a teacher.

## Conclusion

This paper sought to answer two questions: what structures and processes are keeping teachers out of education policy production and why? The answers to these two questions rest upon a broad range of contradictory behaviours and mechanisms associated with ongoing attempts by neoconservatives and neoliberals to come under their leadership. Marketisation, individualism and the alignment by government of education policy with social justice issues, despite evidence to the contrary (Apple 1996), requires teachers and all those concerned with the culture of measurement in education to focus on the complex power relations working on the inside of dominant forces. The task is to ‘give embodied examples of critical pedagogies’, and ‘a more robust sense of socially informed educational action’ (Apple 2018, 140). Whilst teachers have spent years fighting the boundaries of official knowledge (Apple 1996, 2018), this struggle needs more work now than ever as dominant forces within the age of measurement (Biesta 2017) erode the democratic potential of all teachers. The task of the teacher is no longer understood in terms of a professional who has something worth saying and teaching, but has been replaced by

an understanding of the teacher's role as a facilitator of students' learning and to draw out what is already there. This perception has altered the value we place on the role of teachers in education. Evidence-based policy continues to remain the close preserve of formal government agencies, with limited opportunities for teachers to make judgments relevant to their own context. This is a conundrum associated with educational governance, the transformation of teachers' work and shifting work requirements, and highlights the need for critical research frameworks to understand the cultural inequalities that exist within educational policy design.

Education policy is framed by a process of 'economising' education that has huge consequences for teachers. In response, a conceptual space in which to explore and critique educational policy formation must be forged. In order for education policy to shape the landscape differently, attention must be drawn to inadequate approaches to policy development that have their origins in contradictions about the purpose of education itself. Understanding educational policy is not just a matter of understanding the context but also an understanding of the deployment of power as local and from within. Emancipatory research designs are powerful opportunities for teachers who have a keen interest in governance to alter and change their particular realities through reflection and reciprocity. Understanding education policy is not just a matter of understanding the context but also an understanding of the deployment of power as local and from within. In order to change what counts as official knowledge requires working hard against the neoliberal restructuring of society. Achieving educational change that is meaningful and lasting takes time and must be incremental. It involves altering and strengthening values that are often unmeasurable such as human attitudes, experience, knowledge, and skills.

This paper did not seek to establish the correct method of conducting educational policy, producing a tabula rasa that indicates where we must begin again. Instead, it seeks to highlight and explain the structures that teachers must negotiate to allow them to position themselves as co-constructors of knowledge production. This requires challenging assumptions about the role of teachers in education and placing them as central participants in shaping future educational policy. This is not without its difficulties for teachers, who must confront the possibilities of ridicule and precarity or isolation (Ball 2016). But difficulties do not mean impossibilities. It requires a better understanding and interruption of the structures upholding education policy production. Policy with a *decentred* unity, an expansion of what 'we' stands for, as well as critical thinkers and theorists will build a counter-alternative to current realities. It begins with the self – the reimagining of teachers as public intellectuals (Ball 2017; Biesta 2017) whose judgements, experience, and expertise are needed in education policy production. This provides important opportunities for wider processes of social recognition and representation. We need to start somewhere. Let it start with teachers' perception of themselves as active contributors to the teaching profession and with an acknowledgement of the large flaws that exist in current scientific research design.

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### Notes on contributors

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