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### Citation

Marsh, James (2021). A critical investigation into the influence of neoliberal education reform on pedagogy, freedom, and agency in a mainstream UK secondary school. Student dissertation for The Open University module E822 Masters multi-disciplinary dissertation: education, childhood and youth.

### URL

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**Title of research:** A critical investigation into the influence of neoliberal education reform on pedagogy, freedom, and agency in a mainstream UK secondary school

## **Abstract**

Section A of this paper uses dialogic and critical theory to examine the education policy landscape in the UK, venturing the hypothesis that the new managerialism ushered in by neoliberal reform is dependent on monologic pedagogy, which is inherently restrictive and anti-democratic; this is contrasted with dialogic pedagogy, which is shown to offer a democratic alternative. Section B constitutes a proposal for a case study that uses a dialogic approach to investigate the extent to which this hypothesis is reflected in both the reported experiences of teachers and students, and teachers' pedagogical choices, in a mainstream UK secondary school.

*99 words*

## **Introduction**

From the earliest stages of my work in this field of study, I have positioned myself as a critical researcher. As will be evident in Section A, I make no claim to political neutrality in this paper: I am deeply concerned about the effects of the current policy climate, engendered through the neoliberal reforms of the past three decades, on issues of pedagogy, teacher agency, democracy, equity, and student welfare. My concerns have arisen through reading in the realms of critical education theory as part of my Master's study, much of which is rehearsed and developed in Section A, but also through my lived experience as a full-time teacher and middle leader working in a core subject department of a mainstream UK secondary school, in which capacity I must, on a daily basis, find ways to reconcile my values and ideals as a socially-conscious, progressively-minded educator with the demands of a policy environment that I perceive to be increasingly restrictive and even oppressive. From my EE831 EMA onwards, my primary focus has been on two interrelated strands, both of which will be explored at length in the following section – these are the critical analysis of the contemporary education policy landscape, on the one hand, and dialogic pedagogy, on the other. It will be clear to the reader that I view dialogic pedagogy as offering a more equitable and socially just education than that provided by the current system; however, I am yet to elicit the views of colleagues and students in my own professional context on these matters, and this will be the focus of my

proposed research study, outlined in Section B of this paper. In Section A I develop the hypothesis that the current policy climate and the monologic pedagogy that it promotes is inherently anti-democratic and restrictive to both teachers and students, and is harming to personal agency; the focus of my research proposal is to examine the extent to which this is reflected in the reported experience of my colleagues and students. The research questions I am seeking to answer in my proposed study, to be undertaken in my own professional context, are:

1. How does the UK education policy environment affect teachers' and students' sense of freedom and agency in a UK secondary school?
2. How does the UK education policy environment influence teachers' pedagogical choices in a mainstream UK secondary school?

My literature review relies heavily on the notion of hegemony to explain how the disciplinary technologies (Foucault, 1991) arising from the neoliberal marketization of the education sector function to reinforce existing power structures in society and thereby further the interests of the neoliberal project generally; additionally, I postulate that the recent resurgence of approval for teacher-centred, monologic teaching methodologies based around cognitive load theory (CLT) also serves to further the interests of the neoliberal political project, as these methodologies promote an algorithmic, computational model of learning that is precisely what is required to sustain an outcomes-based culture of accountability which rests on the assumption of that there is a simple relationship of causation between teaching and learning. Based on my own experiences as a teacher, I find the view of education arising from the CLT-inspired literature to be dismal and reductive; yet, in my own professional context I witness the increasing influence of the CLT approach on professional development materials, as well as on many of my colleagues and influential figures in the school's senior leadership team. Having explored the relevant literature in depth, I feel confident that I understand, in a theoretical sense, the wider mechanisms underpinning this move away from constructivist thinking in the profession generally; yet what I do not understand is why many of my colleagues have chosen to adopt these methodologies in their day-to-day teaching practice, especially when alternative empirical data can be discovered which testify to the benefits of a constructivist approach – these matters are explored in depth in Section A. I also currently have no formal insight into how students experience these modes of teaching and hope to shed some light on both matters in my proposed research project.

In addition to the notion of hegemony, I use dialogic theory as a conceptual frame in Section A, particularly the dichotomy between monologic and dialogic modes of teaching. I explore how monologic and dialogic pedagogies are built on fundamentally opposing epistemological foundations, which yield autocratic and democratic forms of education, respectively; I also examine how the current policy environment favours, and even relies upon, monologic pedagogies. In the final part of Section A, I explore the extent to which some versions of dialogic pedagogy might be realizable within the mainstream education sector and consider whether it is possible for monologic and dialogic methodologies to coexist within the same pedagogical framework. The theme of dialogism is carried forward into my research proposal and forms a core element of my research methodology; this is outlined in Section B.

819 words

## **SECTION A – LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Monologism and hegemony**

It is necessary at the outset to establish two theoretical concepts that I will be using to frame this discussion: the notion of *monologism*, and the notion of *hegemony*. I intend to show that these two concepts are intertwined and mutually reinforcing within the current education policy environment in the UK (and, indeed, much of the West). These twinned notions lend a political valence to contemporary pedagogical orthodoxy, revealing it as inherently undemocratic and restrictive, thus articulating the central problem that I intend to investigate in this section and informing my first research question.

It is instructive that Mikhail Bakhtin, the literary theorist widely seen as the originator of dialogic theory, uses the analogy of schooling to illustrate what is meant by monologism, so fundamental is it to traditional conceptions of education:

‘In an environment of [...] monologism the genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well [...] Someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error; that is, it is the interaction of teacher and pupil...’

(Bakhtin and Emerson, 1984, p. 81)

This is what the dialogic educationalist Paulo Freire memorably termed the ‘banking concept’ of education: in the ‘banking’ model, the teacher is seen as the arbiter of approved knowledge, ‘depositing’ it in students who are seen as ignorant, passive receptacles waiting to be ‘filled’ - thus, in Freire’s view, education reproduces an ‘ideology of oppression’ (1970, p. 45) by denying voice and agency to the uneducated. Matusov (2007) elaborates further on the oppressional nature of monologism, describing it as a ‘monolithic’, homogenizing force that seeks to establish a ‘unified voice of the universal truth’ (p. 140). Monologism, then, is an absolutist doctrine (Reznitskaya and Gregory, 2013): it claims total epistemological authority, colonizing the minds of the ignorant with reified ‘official’ knowledge that is beyond critique. In the political realm, it is the discourse of autocracy, the language of totalitarianism (Matusov, 2007) – and yet, in education, monologism is still the prevailing pedagogical mode.

When viewed through the lens of hegemony, the ubiquity of monologic pedagogy in the current educational landscape demands critical scrutiny. As I will demonstrate, monologic notions of instruction dominate contemporary discourse around teaching and learning: our current systems of schooling are based on a transmission-and-receipt mode of pedagogy that is inherently oppressive, in which knowledge is conceived of as a fixed property arbitrated and disseminated by the powerful (Freire, 1970).

Apple defines hegemony as ‘an organized assemblage of meanings and practices, the central, effective and dominant system of meanings, values and actions which are *lived*’ (2004, p. 4); it is the ‘saturation’ of consciousness such that economic and educational systems become uncritically and unconsciously subsumed into our experience of reality (2004, p. 4). These forces, which are at once nebulous, knotty and entangled, and therefore difficult to perceive or assail (Williams, 1973), nonetheless serve to reproduce the ‘effective dominant culture’ (Williams, 1973, para. 12) with its class stratification and asymmetries of power (Apple, 2004). In our current historical moment in the West, this dominant culture takes the form of the technocratic society of free-market capitalism engendered by the neoliberal political project across the past half-century.

The notion of the ‘hidden curriculum’ (Jackson, 1968, cited in Giroux and Penna, 1979, p. 30) is instructive when examining how hegemony operates within the school system; it can be understood as the matrix of ‘norms, values and beliefs’ (Giroux and Penna, 1979, p. 22) that is tacitly conveyed to students through the structural systems of schooling, serving to socialize

them in accordance with the requirements of the prevailing culture. Examples of the hidden curriculum at work range from hierarchies within schools reinforcing the hierarchical nature of society, grading and ability-grouping mirroring social class distinctions, and the use of strategies that foster a sense of individualism and self-interest amongst students, which thereby inculcate them with the animating principles of the neoliberal market society (Slater, 1970; Cagan, 1978, cited in Giroux and Penna, 1979). Regarding my first research question, the subliminal, controlling nature of the hidden curriculum renders it inherently oppressive for students, as their behaviours, preferences and priorities are being non-consensually moulded in accordance with interests other than their own. I am interested in the extent to which this is perceived by students in my own setting.

## 2. What is dialogic pedagogy?

The critical position that I articulate in this discussion rests on the distinction between monologic and dialogic pedagogies, and my belief, following extensive reading of relevant literature and especially inspired by Matusov (2007), that dialogic pedagogy is the route to a truly empowering, democratic education. Therefore, it is necessary at this stage to outline the core tenets of dialogic pedagogy and how it offers a democratic alternative to orthodox monologic pedagogy.

In an epistemological sense, dialogic pedagogy rests on the view that knowledge is born out of answers to questions, and therefore cannot exist independently of dialogue, which takes the form of interaction between human voices but also with the larger social context and the wider world (Wegerif, Mercer and Major, 2020). Since dialogue is an ongoing process, knowledge is continually being refined and developed and is never fixed (Wegerif, Mercer and Major, 2020); therefore, dialogic partners have equal claims to knowledge – in the words of Bakhtin ‘truth emerges *between people* collectively searching for truth’ (Bakhtin and Emerson, 1984, p. 110). Thus, the dialogic classroom is inherently democratic, since students and teacher co-construct knowledge and meaning through interaction: the teacher holds no monologic authority over learning content, and students are empowered to contribute to the collective search for meaning and truth. Taking this a stage further, Wegerif, Mercer and Major’s (2020) concept of ‘ontological dialogue’, positions dialogic interaction at the heart of human nature and identity (p. 3) and leads to the view that in true dialogic pedagogy, dialogue becomes more than simply a tool to deployed to improve learning, but rather the process of dialogue itself should be the ultimate ‘product’ of education (p. 3). This is the version of dialogic pedagogy advocated by

Matusov (2007), underpinning his notion of intrinsic, as opposed to instrumental, education; these ideas will be explored later sections. Dialogic pedagogy, then, is rooted in cooperative interaction between human beings existing as equal partners in a shared pursuit of knowledge and truth: it presents learning as a collaborative, social endeavour and is therefore fundamentally opposed to monologic pedagogy, which positions the teacher as the transmitter of reified knowledge and students as passive recipients of this knowledge, over which they exert no ownership or agency.

Reflecting on my own practice, the main reason I am drawn to dialogic pedagogy is because of its potential for empowerment and social justice – this is the version of dialogic pedagogy that originates in the revolutionary thinking of Freire (1970), who outlined an emancipatory vision for dialogic education as a vehicle for the liberation of marginalized classes, and, therefore the route to a more equal society. As an English teacher, I am used to conducting much of my teaching through speaking and discussion – yet I have long recognized a tendency in students towards a lack of confidence and unwillingness to speak; this is often most pronounced in those from disadvantaged or low socioeconomic backgrounds. Where participation does occur, it is often ‘voiceless’, i.e., students merely reproduce the ‘official’ knowledge of the teacher (Segal, Pollak and Lefstein, 2017, p. 12), rather than contributing their own thoughts or ideas; this is as evident in written work as it is in oral participation. This phenomenon, I believe, is a result of the prevailing culture of monologic teaching in the contemporary education landscape, which does not require students to engage in original thought (J. Hardman, 2020), and the force of the hidden curriculum, which teaches working class students to be docile and passive in order to train them for work in the market society (Aronowitz, cited in Giroux and Penna, 1979). When viewed through a Freirean dialogic lens, the silencing of socioeconomically disadvantaged voices within the education system in this way can be seen as a species of oppression, and therefore the systems and pedagogies which engender and sustain this dynamic, such as those I will critique below, become ethically and politically untenable.

### **3. Monologic pedagogy in practice**

I have so far suggested that orthodox pedagogy as enacted within mainstream education is essentially monologic, and therefore anti-democratic, since, by definition, it assumes a relationship of authority and subjectification and is predicated on the notion that knowledge is a reified commodity, arbitrated by the powerful and bestowed upon the powerless via a

unidirectional, transactional process. It is necessary at this point to substantiate this assertion with reference pedagogical practice in contemporary education that can be shown to be monologic in nature.

Skidmore (2020), in a discussion of the extent to which dialogue is possible within traditional classroom environments, draws attention to the early Soviet theorist Yakubinsky's claim that monologism is fundamentally allied to authority – 'one listens to those who have power or authority' (Yakubinsky and Eskin, 1923, cited in Skidmore, 2020, p. 30). This neatly articulates the dominant mode of classroom interaction, whereby all discourse is instantiated, managed, and directed by the teacher, with the silent attention and acquiescent behaviour of students being assumed, and any deviation from this treated as a punishable transgression (Skidmore, 2020). Even ostensibly 'dialogic' episodes of classroom interaction, such as whole-class discussion, can be shown to be essentially monologic in nature, since the selection of topics and speakers, as well as the management of pace and direction, is typically controlled by the teacher (Skidmore, 2020). Regarding my second research question, I expect to return similar findings when observing colleagues in my own setting.

The classic example of the monologic foundation of traditional teaching is the 'IRE' (or 'IRF') exchange, whose ubiquity and persistence is well demonstrated by F. Hardman (2020). The IRE exchange, familiar to all teachers, is the basic three-move script wherein the teacher *initiates* a closed question (sometimes directed to a particular student or group, but often generally to the whole class, with the expectation that enthusiastic students will 'bid' to respond through, for example, a 'hands up' ritual), the selected student then offers a *response* to the teacher, which is then *evaluated* for its accuracy (this is sometimes called the *feedback* stage), before the teacher then moves on to the next closed question, beginning the cycle again (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979, cited in F. Hardman, 2020, p. 141). F. Hardman offers data that show that recitation of this sort is the dominant mode of classroom interaction in Western schooling, with one cited study of 156 systematically observed lessons revealing that only 10% of questioning exchanges involved the teacher using open questions, while only 4% of exchanges stemmed from the teacher building a student's answer into a subsequent question (2020, p. 142). Matusov (2007) refers to the IRE exchange as a 'classic monologic discourse' (p. 114) in which the function of students is to affirm the ultimate truth embodied in the teacher, who objectifies them as sources of error as opposed to viewing them as dialogic partners; this is a model that, according to J. Hardman (2020), nullifies independent thought

on the part of students, requiring only that they report the thoughts of another; I described witnessing this phenomenon in my own practice in Part 2, above.

The monologic substrate to contemporary guidance on effective teaching reveals itself to the critical researcher even when such guidance acknowledges the ineffectiveness of the IRE script and is ostensibly geared towards improving the quality of talk in classrooms, as can be seen in the recommendations put forward by the influential education commentator David Didau in a 2014 volume for teachers which purports to offer solutions for improving literacy in schools. Didau's guidance for classroom discussion places the teacher in a position of unilateral control (Matusov, 2007, p. 53) and unassailable epistemological authority, while students take on the role of docile vessels to be manipulated towards affirmation of the official truth embodied by the teacher (Matusov, 2007, p. 114). This is well demonstrated in the following comments:

'It's vital to assert that *you* [i.e., the teacher - JM] decide whether pupils answer questions, and to make that work you need to eliminate the "I don't know" excuse'.

'When [another student answers], return to the student who "doesn't know" and ask them again. Clearly they will now have an answer as they've just heard one.'

(Didau, 2014, p. 76)

What we see in these recommendations is pseudo-dialogue being used as a means of subjectification and control by the teacher: student agency is suppressed, the right to non-participation is denied and the management of the discussion is firmly in the hands of the teacher, from whose perspective the student's disinclination to answer constitutes an 'off-script' deviation (Matusov, 2007, p. 171). Tellingly, Didau's proposed remedy here is one of 'pedagogical violence' (Matusov, 2007, p. 314): an assault on the offending student's agency and self-concept through public humiliation followed by ventriloquism – 'clearly they will now have an answer as they've just heard one.' This is despite Didau's earlier foregrounding of Nystrand's (1997) call for teacher questioning to require students to engage in independent thinking.

Didau's guidance on improving oracy is elsewhere littered with affirmations of monologic pedagogy: he provides a reductive simplification of the Socratic method which fails to

acknowledge the importance of student enquiry to the process (in the Meno dialogue, for example, the enquiry was initiated by Meno, the student, not Socrates himself) (Matusov, 2007), he frequently uses language of coercion, as in '[students] are *forced* to turn the unformed maelstrom of ideas into something that has structure' (Didau, 2014, p. 84, my emphasis), and concludes by eulogizing the virtues of Direct Instruction, offering a definition which stands as an almost perfect encapsulation of monologic pedagogy:

'The teacher decides the learning intentions and success criteria, makes them transparent to the students, demonstrates them by modelling, evaluates if they understand what they have been told by checking for understanding, and re-telling them what they have told by tying it all together with closure.'

(Hattie, 2009, cited in Didau, 2014, p. 91)

Guidance such as that discussed above has its roots in cognitive load theory (CLT), which has, in recent decades, emerged as a rival paradigm to the historically influential constructivist view of learning (Kirschner, Sweller and Clark, 2006). Put briefly, constructivist conceptions of learning - to which dialogic pedagogy can be allied - hold that learners' involvement in constructing their own learning is of paramount importance (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan and Chinn, 2006); this view was manifested most famously (or notoriously) in the concept of 'discovery learning' advocated by Bruner (Kirschner, Sweller and Clark, 2006, p. 77), a pedagogical approach whose efficacy was subsequently unsupported by empirical studies (Kirschner, Sweller and Clark, 2006) and which now, sadly, appears to serve as something of a caricature used to dismiss constructivism out of hand (e.g. in Kirschner and Hendrick, 2020). The CLT view of learning, by contrast, is based on recent findings from cognitive science that reveal the centrality of memory in the learning process (Kirschner, Sweller and Clark, 2006), encapsulated in the mantra 'learning is change in long-term memory' (Kirschner and Hendrick, 2020, p. 172), which has gained significant traction as a meme in the UK teaching community in recent years. The fact that I have witnessed the increasing influence of CLT-influenced teaching methodologies in my own professional context is the impetus behind my second research question.

Whilst the enhanced picture of cognitive architecture revealed by CLT is clearly empirically secure (Kirschner, Sweller and Clark, 2006) and therefore extremely valuable to educators, the

fact that constructivism and CLT are typically presented as occupying opposite ends of the continuum from student-led learning to teacher-led direct instruction, respectively, can be considered problematic when viewed through the lens of monologism and hegemony. The optimum pedagogical mode, from a CLT perspective, is direct teacher instruction involving modelling and worked examples, leading, via scaffolding, to independent practice – essentially, ‘learners should be explicitly shown what to do and how to do it’ (Kirschner, Sweller and Clark, 2006, p. 79). The first issue here is that there appears to be no room in this process for dialogue: the CLT approach depends on a classic transmission model in which the teacher’s monologic jurisdiction over truth and knowledge is assumed, and social aspects of learning are ignored. On this note, in a paper that challenges Kirschner, Sweller and Clark’s (2006) dismissal of constructivist theories of learning, Schmidt et al. (2006) make the case that the typical CLT model fails to acknowledge the benefits of collaborative learning, particularly in dealing with complex tasks; in a similar vein, Hmelo-Silver, Duncan and Chinn (2006) suggest that CLT presents a reductive view of learning as consisting of only ‘conceptual and procedural knowledge’ and fails to take into account ‘flexible thinking skills’ that ‘prepare students to be lifelong learners’ (p. 102). A second issue is that CLT couches teaching and learning in algorithmic terms: an input-output process in which students are viewed as processing units that must be ‘activated’. This computational framing risks dehumanizing students, ‘de-socializing’ learning (Ball, 2003, p. 226) and recasting teachers as technicians; this in turn reinforces the technocratic, outcomes-based performativity culture in contemporary education (Biesta, 2009) and serves to legitimate the neoliberal stratification of society based on ‘technical cultural capital and individual accumulation of economic capital’ (Apple, 2004, p. 78) – a point I will return to later. Despite the veracity of the cognitive science on which it rests, what emerges from the CLT literature is a version of education that is instrumental and alienating as opposed to intrinsic and empowering (Matusov and Sullivan, 2020): students are portrayed as inept and inert subjects to be manipulated at will, their consent in the process assumed, and learning is reimagined as the memorization and performative reproduction of approved knowledge and skills in the context of summative assessment. As Matusov and Sullivan (2020) assert, such a regime – in which education is non-consensually imposed upon students by society for instrumental ends as opposed to originating in students’ own voluntary search for self-actualization and meaning – cannot be sustained without pedagogical violence, that is, systems of coercive control, such as reward/sanction policies, humiliation and shaming (as seen in the example from Didau, 2014, above), and frequent use of summative assessment based on grading, all of which contribute to a culture of oppression and the denial of agency. More insidiously, when viewed through the lens of hegemony and the hidden curriculum, the

systems of assessment and grading associated with the sort of teacher-led instruction that the CLT literature advocates can be viewed as inculcating students with the knowledge that satisfactory achievement of bureaucratic tasks yields instrumental gains (Matusov and Sullivan, 2020, p. 441), thus training students for their roles as 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1991, p. 180) within the neoliberal bureaucratic society.

#### **4. The Global Education Reform Movement (GERM)**

Sahlberg (2012) coined the term 'Global Education Reform Movement (GERM)' to refer to the trend amongst most Western nations towards the 'marketization' of education. This can be viewed as moving in step with the wider neoliberal political project, characterized by themes of deregulated markets, privatization, and rampant individualism, coalescing around the central dogma that competition fuels innovation and drives up standards. In Part 3 I demonstrated how hegemony, operating through the hidden curriculum, serves to socialize students in line with this ideology, which is particularly well-served by the prevailing monologic, instrumentalist orthodoxy within the current education policy environment. Sahlberg identifies three essential characteristics of the GERM movement: competition between schools, the refiguring of parents as 'consumers' in an educational pseudo-marketplace, and the rise of rigid accountability measures – which are manifested most notoriously in the UK sector in the forms of the GCSE examination league tables and the ever-present existential threat posed by the schools inspectorate, Ofsted. Apple (2004) couches this in more overtly political terms by claiming that school league tables provide the political right with a convenient way to put 'price tags' (p. 197) on schools, making apparent failure in the system more clearly visible in order to advance the argument that historic attempts at reform have been unsuccessful and therefore marketization is the only recourse (Apple, 2004). Interestingly, Sahlberg's model sees the inception of the academies programme in the UK as a paradigmatic by-product of the GERM movement: autonomy is essential if genuine competition is to occur, so the emergence within the state education sector of pseudo-private entities decoupled from local government is essentially predicted by the GERM model. Apple (2004), on the subject of whether a UK-style National Curriculum is a viable option for US schools, makes a similar observation, pointing out that the accountability and surveillance systems that would be necessarily required to underwrite such a centralized curriculum would inevitably lead to increased privatization as an inherent feature of marketization, twinned with, paradoxically, greater monological control over knowledge. I believe that this is what we are now seeing within the 'academies' movement in England: whilst these entities are technically decoupled from local authority control and are granted freedom

over curriculum, the restrictive nature of the accountability ‘panopticon’ (Rabinow, 1991, p. 18) and the performativity climate that it has engendered has stifled any sense of diversity or progressive innovation, leading to a neutered monoculture in which the paramount concern is what Biesta (2009) terms ‘the qualification function’ (p. 40) of education, that is, the role of education in contributing to economic growth through the shaping of the labour force, rather than the ‘subjectification function’ of education (p. 40) which can be understood as the mechanism by which education encourages students to engage in ways of being that ‘hint at independence’ from existing social orders and thereby cultivate critical consciousness. In terms of Matusov’s (2020) instrumental-intrinsic dichotomy, we can equate the ‘qualification function’ with education for instrumental ends, a goal-oriented process of ‘becoming’ as opposed to the self-actualizing ‘being’ of intrinsic education, which, in promoting ‘critical authorship’ aligns with Biesta’s ‘subjectification function’ of education (Matusov, 2020, p. 15); I hope to ascertain how students in my own context perceive these issues in the process of gathering data for my first research question.

## **5. Accountability, performativity and ‘learnification’**

Standardized accountability instruments are essential to ensure the veracity of the school ranking systems that animate the GERM philosophy, and, according to Biesta (2009, p. 33), this has created an outcomes-based culture within education which mistakenly equates educational effectiveness with examination scores and obfuscates underlying questions of value and purpose; in the words of Watkins (2005), the discourse becomes overly focused on ‘what works’ rather than ‘what’s worth working on’ (p.11). Central to Biesta’s thesis is what he terms the ‘learnification’ of education (2009, p. 36), that is, the shifting of the vocabulary of educational discourse away from ‘education’ and towards ‘a language of learning’ (p. 38), which he sees as a symptom of – among other things - the same neoliberal market forces as I described above. The technological nomenclature of the Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) literature, explored in Part 3, can be viewed as reinforcing the ‘learnification’ phenomenon.

One might be forgiven for viewing this surveillance and accountability infrastructure as ideologically neutral – merely a technology of neoliberal education reform that should not be conflated with the doctrines of the political movement itself (Chatwin, 2021). This, however, is not the view taken by Apple (2004), who warns of the dangers inherent in importing technologies of systems management into the education sector, firstly because – chiming with Biesta’s concerns above – such systems recast all problems in education as ‘technical

problems that only necessitate instrumental strategies' (p. 104), closing down deeper enquiry of an ethical and political nature; this, interestingly, mirrors the way that the cognitive load theory literature reduces learning itself to a unidirectional algorithmic process. Apple's second concern is that these systems function as a 'technological ideology' in their own right, imposing and maintaining 'technical control and certainty' (2004, p. 103) while masquerading as a legitimate science and thereby placing themselves beyond scrutiny. This, according to Apple, is in the service of maintaining existing power structures in society: the technocratic-scientific nomenclature of systems management is designed to appeal to the affluent and industrial classes whose 'sentiments...resonate strongly to technical expertise and industrial logic' (p. 109) and will therefore remain supportive of the education system even as it fails the disadvantaged.

The surveillance and accountability infrastructure within education has been described by Ball (2003) as a 'technology of performativity' (p. 216) – a regulatory system that judges performances or displays of apparent quality, often witnessed via isolated 'moments' (p. 216) of scrutiny, as reliable indicators of the worth or value of an institution. This, according to Ball, has engendered a culture of 'cynical compliance' (2003, p. 222), built around artifice and fabrication, in constant deference to the competitive reality of the market model (Ball, 2003), which has led to a sort of axiological crisis within teachers, whose sense of value and purpose is in constant tension with the performativity architecture that imprisons them, reducing them to production workers judged on 'outputs' (Ball, 2003, p. 224). Such a system, in Foucauldian terms, constitutes a 'disciplinary technology' whose aim is the forging of 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1991, p. 180) for the purposes of manipulation and control. The refiguring of teachers' worth and value in terms of aptitudes that can be gauged using accountability data, such as examination results and progress metrics, or performance rubrics such as the Teachers' Standards, can be seen as an act of dissociation, of neutralizing the latent power of teachers as creative agents and transfiguring it into a 'relation of strict subjection' (Foucault, 1991, p. 182) - and thus, to return to my first research question, harming teachers' freedom and personal agency.

Returning to the growing influence of CLT on contemporary educational discourse, one could claim that the re-orientation of the teaching profession around a paradigm that champions a technological, transactional model of pedagogy couched in computational language is precisely to be expected given the technocratic nature of the accountability and surveillance infrastructure on which the entire project of neoliberal education reform rests: in order to sustain

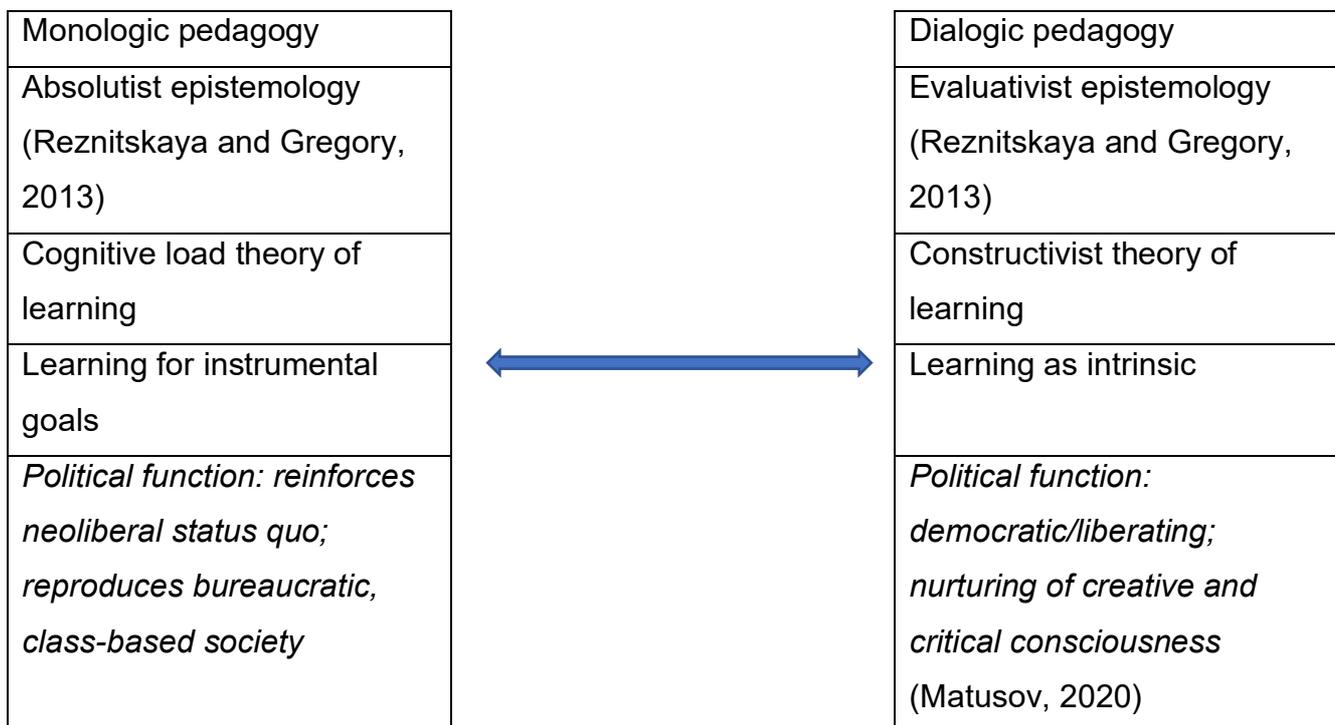
a system based on competition between schools, reliable and convincing ranking metrics must be devised, which, in turn, necessitate a focus on educational ‘outcomes’ that can be simply represented as data points. And underpinning the entire accountability edifice is the core assumption that schools, and therefore teachers, are directly responsible for these educational outcomes, which are considered one-and-the-same with educational success. Thus teacher-led pedagogies come to the fore, for if teachers are not the direct *cause* of students’ learning, and therefore the authors of student ‘outcomes’, how can they be held to account? How can they be controlled? Following Foucault (1991), we might also postulate that the core assumption of the current education policy environment, which is that teaching causes learning, and the punitive regime of accountability that stems from it, serves to keep teachers in the necessary state of docility required by a system in which they must fulfil their role as technicians, unwittingly socializing students in line with the norms and behaviours of the bureaucratic market society.

Biesta’s ‘learnification’ phenomenon and the technological, CLT-influenced vision of teaching and learning to which it is allied has had a significant influence on educational discourse in the UK in recent years. A 2014 research review commissioned by the Sutton Trust – an influential government-adjacent charity that investigates barriers to social mobility - titled ‘What makes effective teaching?’ states on the first page that effective teaching is ‘that which leads to improved student achievement using outcomes that matter to their future success’ and that this teaching ‘must be checked against the progress being made by students’ (Coe et al., 2014, p. 2). These statements betray a strong bias towards the instrumental, ‘qualification function’ (Biesta, 2009, p. 40) of education, and raise obvious questions around exactly how ‘outcomes’ and ‘progress’ are defined, as well as presupposing that instruments can be devised which reliably measure such phenomena. On this note, a recent study into the reliability of the England’s ‘Progress 8’ value-added measure, used as the primary metric for evaluation and ranking of state secondary schools, reported troubling findings that expose the fallibility of the outcomes-based accountability models necessitated by neoliberal education reform: unlike previous value-added measures in England, the Progress 8 measure does not correct for socioeconomic and demographic variables in pupil background (Leckie and Goldstein, 2019), and therefore, presents a distorted picture of school quality in which ‘schools with more “educationally advantaged” intakes’ (Leckie and Goldstein, 2019, p. 520) report inflated progress scores, while ‘the true effectiveness of many schools in disadvantaged areas will go unnoticed’ (p. 521); these findings give the lie to the UK Government’s claim that correcting for socioeconomic variables would further entrench social inequality and ‘excuse low-performing

schools' (p. 521). Once again, evoking the concept of hegemony is instructive: what we see here is a supposedly robust and fair performance measure actually reproducing social inequality through the favouring of the already-advantaged and punishment of the disadvantaged – thus the existing class stratification of society is maintained.

## 6. Towards dialogic pedagogy

It appears, at this stage, that we have arrived at a point of irreconcilable conflict. I have thus far made the case that the contemporary education policy landscape and the systems that sustain it are in a relationship of mutual dependence with a technological, monologic mode of pedagogy in which 'learning' is conceived of as a tangible property which can be transmitted and measured, and that the ecology of this educational landscape is inherently oppressive to both students and teachers. I have also referenced three problematic dichotomies: monologic pedagogy vs. dialogic pedagogy; cognitive load theories of learning vs. constructivist theories of learning; and instrumental vs. intrinsic learning. These dichotomies can be represented on the same plane, as shown below, articulating the 'master' dichotomy, as I see it.



One could be forgiven for seeing little hope for dialogic pedagogy in mainstream schooling given the case I have presented thus far, and, indeed, this is the view held by Matusov (2007), who sees the 'project' of education (p. 3), as inherently anti-dialogical. The question is, how useful is this way of thinking to the critically minded educator situated within this system? I

believe that the dichotomies I have presented are valuable as conceptual tools, but how much value do they offer to working teachers wishing to make practical changes to their teaching methodologies? Whilst I do believe that, ultimately, the full realization of dialogic pedagogy will require the wholesale transformation of our educational landscape and the philosophies that underpin it, the task of critical, progressive educators of the current moment who strive for a more democratic and equitable education system must surely be to explore strategies for bringing some of the principles of dialogism into mainstream classrooms.

## 7. Dialogic pedagogy in practice

Perhaps the most comprehensive framework offered for the practical realization of a dialogic pedagogy within the context of mainstream schooling is that devised by Robin Alexander (2018). Foremost in Alexander's model is his list of 'justifications' for the use of dialogic teaching, which serve to support his founding claim that 'education is an ethical as well as instrumental endeavour' (p. 564). The sentiment expressed here resonates with Matusov's (2020) notion of intrinsic learning, although it is notable that, unlike Matusov, Alexander does not reject the instrumental function of education outright. At the outset of Alexander's paper, then, we can detect an attempt to carve out some common ground between the opposing polarities articulated in the dichotomies I presented above.

Alexander follows his 'justifications' with a list of 'principles', comprising what he terms the 'five tests' of dialogic teaching: it must be collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful (2018, p. 566). The final criterion is arguably Alexander's biggest concession to the pressures of the outcomes-based policy environment: whilst he acknowledges that classroom discussion holds intrinsic value, its instrumental function as 'a means to an educational end' (p. 566) is emphasized.

As Alexander continues, it becomes apparent that the rejection of dichotomous thinking is a key theme: in his repertoire of 'teaching talk' (2018, p. 568), for example, devised following extensive classroom observation in several countries, he acknowledges the importance of the typically monologic strategies of rote, recitation, instruction and exposition alongside the more typically dialogic strategies of discussion and dialogue, offering this as a corrective to the 'familiar opposition' between 'transmission' and 'discovery' (p. 568) and cautioning against applying a moral valence to the monologic-dialogic opposition such that 'traditional' methods such as rote and recitation are considered 'bad' and dialogue is considered 'good' (pp. 568-

569). Alexander, in another work, states his rejection of dichotomy in favour of 'repertoire' more explicitly: 'dichotomy closes debate and diminishes points; inclusivity and repertoire enlarge them' (2010, p. 108). This statement, on the one hand, by serving as both an invitation to dialogue and a call for the forging of new meanings, stays true to the philosophy underpinning dialogic thought, offering a hopeful glimpse of a possible a 'third way' between monologic and dialogic pedagogies; on the other hand, however, the suggestion that monologic and dialogic teaching methodologies can coexist within the same paradigm overlooks the fundamental epistemological conflict between these modes of thought.

Alexander provides further justification for the inclusion of monologic teaching strategies within his dialogic teaching framework by referring to the work of Nystrand et al. whose study of high school literature classes concluded that typically 'dialogic' teaching strategies such as authentic questions and group discussion work, 'did not categorically produce learning', whereas traditionally monologic techniques, such as recitation, were not 'categorically ineffective' (Nystrand et al., 1997, cited in Alexander, 2018, p. 569). Such statements once again reflect a bias towards the instrumental, as opposed to intrinsic, function of education, but also serve as a reminder that dialogic pedagogy is unlikely to gain credence in mainstream education unless it can be shown to have instrumental utility; hence Alexander's subsequent caution, leaning towards the vocabulary of the CLT-influenced literature, that unless the impact of classroom talk is 'primarily cognitive', the efficacy of classroom dialogue as a tool for learning is compromised.

Alexander's final repertoires of 'questioning' and 'extending' (2018, pp. 569-570) provide the most practically useful guidance for practitioners wishing to move away from monologic teaching methods: these repertoires significantly expand the traditional, narrow use of teacher questioning as part of recitation (i.e., the IRE/IRF script, explored in Part 3), outlining a range of dialogic questioning strategies and purposes, such as developing and probing (p. 569), as well as offering practical suggestions for how teachers might engage dialogically with student responses through 'extending'. Much of Alexander's recommendations around questioning can be aligned with J. Hardman's work on 'opening up' the IRE/IRF structure (2020, p. 154) to transform otherwise closed monologic exchanges into dialogic interaction. J. Hardman's study centres on the idea that teachers can elicit dialogic interaction in classrooms by altering how they deal with student responses to questions, i.e., replacing the 'evaluation' move in the IRE script with a call for 'elaboration, argumentation and extended reasoning' (2020, pp. 155-156); J. Hardman then presents transcript data from classroom interactions which demonstrate that

this leads to higher quality classroom discussion. In a summary of the findings of the study, she describes the discussion of students in the dialogic intervention group as consisting of 'higher levels of explanation, argumentation, challenge and justification', thus suggesting a 'more dialogic' mode of interaction (p. 162).

Matusov would dismiss the idea that true dialogic pedagogy can have an instrumental, goal-oriented function as outlined in Alexander's framework, and echoed in J. Hardman's call for further evidence that dialogic pedagogy can generate 'significant gains in student learning' (2020, p. 164), since he maintains that 'genuine dialogue' is not possible if it is geared towards a known endpoint (2007, p. 3). Indeed, in Matusov's terms, Alexander's version of dialogic pedagogy would be reduced to mere 'instrumental dialogic pedagogy', i.e., the use of dialogic methods in a narrow sense, in order to improve learning, as opposed to 'ontological dialogic pedagogy' (Matusov, 2007, p. 5) which recognizes the centrality of dialogue to human existence and seeks to place dialogicity at the heart of education.

But can Matusov's 'ontological dialogic pedagogy' actually be enacted in a conventional school context? Matusov (2007) provides some indication of what this might look like, beginning with the idea that truly dialogic teaching cannot be achieved unless the role of the teacher is reimaged as 'Learner No. 1' in the classroom (p. 5), i.e., the teacher must commit herself to genuine learning alongside students and be ready to 'suspend the certainty' of her own knowledge, testing and re-negotiating it through dialogue in the classroom - thus, both instruction and curriculum are defined by 'genuine information-seeking questions' that students and teacher ask of each other (p. 5). (Note the stark contrast here with the slogans of the CLT-inspired literature, such as 'learners should be explicitly shown what to do and how to do it' (Kirschner, Sweller and Clark, 2006, p. 79).) Matusov (2007) posits that such a climate of genuine dialogue is achieved through the teacher's skilful use of 'provocation', to reveal students' subjectivities (p. 196) and 'generate ontological surprises and tensions' that inspire questions (p. 376).

We see a similar 'ontological' approach to dialogic teaching in the methods explored by Miyazaki (2020), which originate in the Japanese pedagogical tradition founded in the twentieth century by Kihaku Saitou. At the heart of the Saitou approach is the idea of teacher and students engaging in mutual authentic learning; that is, a teacher should aim to 'engage wholeheartedly with the learning material' (Miyazaki, 2020, p. 230) alongside the students, as opposed to merely seeking pedagogical knowledge on how to best guide the students through

the curriculum. Part of this process involves the teacher seeking to discover and explore 'unknown questions' (Miyazaki, 2020, p. 233) both during the planning and delivery stages of teaching; these can be questions that the teacher herself has about the learning material, but they can also take the form of the 'hidden' questions behind students' 'wrong' answers, which, in Saitou's pedagogy, rather than being considered incorrect, are reimagined as simply answers to questions that the teacher did not ask (Miyazaki, 2020). Miyazaki's classroom model closely resembles Watkins' (2005) description of a classroom functioning as a 'community of learners' in which students' engagement in 'collaborative enquiry' increases individual agency, 'group productivity' and 'cognitive engagement' (p. 52).

It is clear that 'ontological' versions of dialogic pedagogy such as those outlined by Matusov and Miyazaki require a drastic epistemic shift on the part of teachers – a move away from the belief that their own subject knowledge is necessarily authoritative and finalized; I can imagine that many teachers would experience this refiguring of their role as 'Learner Number 1' as opposed to 'Expert Number 1' in the classroom (Matusov, 2007, p. 66) to be a destabilizing threat to their authority and professionalism, especially given the recent emphasis on the importance of teacher quality and expertise in research literature aimed at the profession, such as the data presented by Hattie (2003), which reveal that, once the contribution of the student themselves has been taken into account, the single most important factor affecting the variance in student achievement is the teacher. Such findings contribute to the wider trend towards teacher-led, transmission-based modes of pedagogy based on cognitive conceptions of learning which I have shown to be problematic on several levels; however, they also increase the value placed on teachers and perhaps even the respect awarded to them in the wider culture. The omission of epistemological concerns from Alexander's framework, then, as well as his attempt to incorporate dialogic methods alongside traditional monologic methods, could be seen as an attempt to mitigate negative impacts on teacher authority, expertise, and self-image.

Watkins (2005) provides a promising model of how the principles of dialogic pedagogy could be applied to the organization of classroom culture: whilst he never explicitly connects his work to dialogic theory, Watkins' vision of classrooms reimagined as 'learning communities' (p. 41) built on the cumulative co-construction of knowledge, and in which the concept of learning is viewed as a fundamentally social phenomenon, clearly upholds the philosophy and principles of dialogism. Of particular use to practising teachers is Watkins' call for class 'community projects' (2005, p. 35) to take precedence over students' individual work, in order that 'social

relations and knowledge creation' (p. 44) can meet: I see the introduction of community projects within classes as a practically achievable change that teachers can make from within the existing pedagogical paradigm – an example, perhaps, of introducing dialogic experiences through changes at the task level as opposed to effecting more fundamental changes in teachers' approach to instruction and epistemology, which may be difficult to achieve without wholesale systemic change in the education sector. Innovations such those proposed by Watkins, along with the adoption of Alexander's (2018) dialogic teaching repertoires, could help to map out new territory of cohabitation between the extremes of the transmission-based monologic pedagogy demanded by the current outcomes-based policy environment, and the more social, collaborative and democratic vision of learning offered by dialogic pedagogy. Critically minded educators who subscribe to the emancipatory and democratic ideals of dialogism must be prepared to engage in meaningful and creative collaboration with diverse voices, theories, and methodologies within education in order to help build a future that works for all. Fittingly, it seems that the solution, at least for now, is dialogue.

## **8. Concluding statement**

In this literature review I have critically examined the current education policy environment and the systems and teaching methodologies that emerge from it, showing how these are restrictive, oppressive, and harming to personal agency for both students and teachers. I have argued that the monologic status quo within contemporary pedagogy endures primarily for reasons of political expediency rather than educational benefit, as it reproduces the social order required by the neoliberal market society; finally, I have outlined what I believe to be a more equitable and democratic alternative the form of dialogic pedagogy. Regarding my research intentions, I am keen to discover the extent to which the hypothesis I have presented here is reflected in the reported experiences of students and teachers in my own setting.

*7112 words*

## **SECTION B – RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

### **1. Development of research questions**

This project has its roots in my EE831 EMA, which focused on dialogic pedagogy and culminated in several researchable questions, most of which centred on some aspect of the

process of bringing dialogic pedagogy into a mainstream context. One of these questions, ‘What are the perceptions of secondary school students and/or teachers regarding the shift from monologic to dialogic teaching?’ (Marsh, 2020, p. 10), re-emerged in a more specific form in my second TMA for this course: ‘How do students and teachers within the English department of a UK state secondary school report their experiences of transitioning from monologic to dialogic pedagogy?’ (Marsh, 2021, p. 6). This was my first working RQ when I began this dissertation; the other working RQ was, ‘According to students and teachers, what are the most successful strategies for introducing dialogic teaching practices within the English department of a UK state secondary school, and what are the barriers to achieving this?’ During the process of the literature review, however, it became clear that my main focus was on the critical analysis of the current policy landscape in the UK and the mechanisms that sustain it, leading to the development of my core hypothesis as outlined in the introduction to this paper. For this reason, it was necessary to re-think my RQs to bring them in line with the direction my literature review was taking; however, it was always my intention, given my interest in dialogic theory, to carry out research that involved eliciting the voices of students - and I did not want to abandon this element of the research. My final RQs, once again, are:

1. How does the UK education policy environment affect teachers’ and students’ sense of freedom and agency in a UK secondary school?
2. How does the UK education policy environment influence teachers’ pedagogical choices in a mainstream UK secondary school?

## **2. Methodology**

The research I am proposing will take the form of a case study – a research approach which can ‘deepen understanding in real contexts’ (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2014a, p. 4). Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2014a) explain that the case study approach, in revealing the deep complexity of educational settings, provides a powerful alternative to the decontextualized quantitative educational research models which have gained prominence following neoliberal reform. The choice to engage in case study education research, then, can be viewed to some extent as a rejection of the technological view of education that has

emerged in the wake of these reforms and the accountability and performance cultures they have engendered – thus rendering it a particularly apt approach given the focus of my criticism in this research. It should be noted, however, that the ‘action research’ approach is more typically favoured by those working within the critical theory paradigm (The Open University, 2019a), though I have elected not to use this approach because I am not seeking to position myself and my own practice at the centre of the study (McAteer, 2014a), and I will not be carrying out iterative cycles of action and reflection (McAteer, 2014b): the purpose of the present study, rather, will be to try to gain insight and understanding into the lived experiences of teachers and students and the extent to which they feel restricted and/or disempowered. Depending on the findings of the study, this may lead to a more action-oriented project in the future.

Whilst Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2014a) acknowledge that the definition of ‘case study’ varies depending on which researchers or research traditions one consults, they recommend viewing it as a particular ‘research genre’ which is a way of ‘framing’ a ‘bounded unit’, from which the ‘guiding principles’ of ‘research design, process, quality and communication’ emerge (p. 7). I find this conception useful, and have used it to inform my proposal. It should also be noted that Merriam’s concept of a ‘heuristic’ case study, i.e., one that aims to bring about ‘the discovery of new meaning...or confirm what is known’ (cited in Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2014a, p. 5) is applicable to my proposed study. The case study approach, being a predominantly qualitative research genre, is also particularly suitable given my interest in dialogism, which takes the ontological position that reality is socially constructed, and that knowledge and meaning are emerge through dialogue. I aim to stay true to the principles of dialogic theory throughout the study.

My methodological approach for the proposed study aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, in that I plan to make use of ethnographic methods such as observation, semi-structured interviews and group discussion to arrive at an understanding of a range of different viewpoints (The Open University, 2019a); however, given my positioning as a critical researcher, I cannot claim the axiological neutrality typically required in the interpretivist tradition (Corbetta, 2011); this emphasizes the importance of reflexivity to my study (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). A core aim of the study is to engage my chosen participants in a process of reflection on their lived experiences of teaching and learning, thus, returning to dialogic theory, to engage them in what might be considered the first stage of *praxis*, that is, reflecting critically on their ‘existential reality in a dialogic manner’ (Mayo, 2020, p. 460).

### 3. Research design and methods

The study will take place over one academic year, and will be divided into three phases, corresponding to the three terms of the academic calendar. The 'bounded unit' of the case will be the school in which I currently work, from which I will recruit two research groups: the first research group will consist of teachers, and the second group will consist of students. During the first phase of the project (autumn term) I will work with the teacher group, the second phase (spring term) will be focused on the student group, and the third phase (summer term) will involve the amalgamation of the two groups into a teacher-student research group during which findings, realizations, and reflections from the first two phases can be explored through shared dialogue. The decision to cover most of the work with teacher participants in the autumn term is because this is typically the time during which there is least pressure, owing to the fact that GCSE preparation tends not to start in earnest until the spring term. In addition to the data generated from the two research groups, I will also collect data through semi-structured interviews with senior staff members, lesson observations of teachers and students, participant reflective logs, and my own field notes.

The population of the groups is a key consideration. Regarding the teacher group, it will be important to gain a representative sample of practitioners from a range of subject disciplines in order to account for variance in epistemological positioning – some subject domains are likely to be more strictly monologic in their pedagogy than others, and may therefore be more approving of more technological, cognitive conceptions of learning that I have criticized, while others may be more 'dialogic' in their epistemology and teaching philosophy and may therefore be more critical of the status quo. The group will need to be of a size that will allow all participants to make meaningful discussion contributions within the one-hour meeting time, as well as to allow me to be able to observe all participants over the course of a term without impinging on my own teaching obligations. For these reasons, I will restrict the number of participants in the teacher group to five. Given the sensitive and personal nature of the matters that will be discussed, and the need to establish a 'safe space' for open dialogue, I will not include any members of the senior leadership team in the research group as the presence of such individuals may deter participants from the open and honest sharing of experiences. With regard to the student group, I will restrict the number to 10 participants – two from each year group. The reasons for the larger number in the student group are, firstly, to reflect the much larger number of students compared to teachers in the school and, secondly, to enable

students to feel more relaxed and open during the meetings. I will endeavour to obtain as representative a sample of students as possible, i.e., in terms of ability, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender etc.; however, I acknowledge that this will be difficult to achieve since I will be relying on voluntary participation.

Key to the project will be regular one-hour after school meetings with the research groups: these will be scheduled every two weeks so as not to exert undue pressure on participants' time, reflecting the ethical need to 'avoid imposition' (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009, p. 499), and adhering to article 34 of the BERA ethical guidelines, which emphasize the need to refrain from making 'excessive demands' on participants (BERA, 2018, p. 19). These meetings will be a chance for participants to engage in 'collective biography work' (Kristensen, 2013, p.119), recounting first-hand experiences of issues of freedom, agency and restriction at the school, and engaging in reflective dialogues prompted by my observations of their practice. Each meeting will be audio-recorded to enable me to be fully attentive to participants' contributions, and to join in the dialogue, where appropriate, in a process of 'respectful negotiation, joint control, and reciprocal learning' (Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007, p. 17). A regular space will need to be secured for the two-weekly research group meetings: for the convenience and safety of participants, this will need to be a classroom in the school. Access to a suitably sized room should not pose a problem given that the meetings will be taking place after teaching hours; however, in accordance with article 3 of the BERA ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018), which highlights the importance of the rights of individuals 'indirectly affected' (p. 7) by the research, care should be taken to ensure that, if the room has a regular occupant or 'owner', this person is given advance notice of its usage as part of this study.

In addition to the research group meetings, I will also carry out non-participant lesson observations (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2014b) of all five teacher participants during Phase 1; this will be to obtain data in support of RQ2, but also to generate material as stimulus for reflective dialogue in the research group meetings, as mentioned above. I will also encourage the five teachers in the research group to keep a reflective log throughout Phase 1, which will generate data for analysis as well as, again, providing stimulus material for discussion in research group meetings. In Phase 2, I will carry out participant observations (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2014b) of research-group students in their normal lessons: unlike the teacher observations, the purpose of these will not be to gain an 'outsider-looking-in' perspective (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier, 2014b, p. 15), but rather to engage in short dialogues with students while they are engaged in learning tasks with a view to gaining insight

into their experience, thus generating data for RQ1. All lesson observations will last for the duration of a single lesson (one hour), and I will make field notes throughout. A further source of data for the study will be pedagogy-related materials produced by the school, e.g., training materials/web links disseminated to staff, meeting handouts, INSET documents, the school's in-house teaching and learning website, and any related internal policy documentation, which I will critically analyse from the theoretical position I outlined in Section A; finally, I will keep a reflective journal of general field notes throughout the project.

*Methods overview:*

<b>Teacher research group</b>	<b>Student research group</b>	<b>Other data sources</b>
Autobiographical work and reflective dialogue as part of group (recorded and selectively transcribed)	Autobiographical work and reflective dialogue as part of group (recorded and selectively transcribed)	Semi-structured interviews with senior leaders (recorded and selectively transcribed)
Reflective journals	Participant lesson observation (field notes made)	Researcher general field notes
Non-participant lesson observation (field notes made)		Document analysis of school CPD materials relating to pedagogy/teaching and learning and associated in-school policies

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#### 4. Trustworthiness and rigour

Under article 60 of the BERA ethical guidelines (2018), all education researchers are obligated to communicate the extent to which their 'data collection and analysis techniques' are 'robust' and meet 'criteria...of quality and integrity' (p. 28). Lincoln and Guba (in Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007) offer a comprehensive framework for judging the rigour of qualitative research, comprising two separate groups of criteria. The first group is intended to provide a direct parallel to the traditional reliability criteria of the positivist paradigm and comprises four elements: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (p. 18). Two aspects of my proposal meet their recommended techniques to ensure credibility: firstly, in spanning a whole academic year, my study will involve 'prolonged engagement' (p. 18) with the respondents and phenomena under investigation and, secondly, I will be using a variety of research methods which will allow for the triangulation of data. The only technique to achieve the criterion of transferability, according to Lincoln and Guba, is to offer 'thick descriptive data' (p.19) that enable readers to judge degrees of similarity to other contexts; I will endeavour to provide this data through commentary on the interview and research meeting transcripts, as well as in the introduction to the research report itself. The final two criteria, dependability and confirmability (p.19), are concerned with the assessment of the rigour of the research process and data analysis, respectively, and require the input of an 'external, disinterested auditor' (p. 19) Owing to the practical constraints of my project, which will be a work-based study carried out alongside my teaching obligations, the recruitment of a third party assessor from outside my professional context will not be achievable; however, I have several colleagues who have completed Master's degrees in education, and will endeavour to recruit one of these to act in the capacity of auditor. Although this will not fully satisfy the requirement set out by Lincoln and Guba, I believe it will provide some assurance as to the dependability and confirmability of my study.

Regarding Lincoln and Guba's second group of criteria, conceived as unique aspects of qualitative research, my decision to conduct much of the research through group dialogues between members of different subject departments meets one aspect of their criterion of fairness (Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba, 2007, pp. 20-21), as it allows for the presentation of different value systems, while the fact that much of the research group work will encourage participants to reflect critically on their experiences aligns with the criterion of ontological

authentication (p. 22); the 'increased understanding' achieved by both me as a researcher and the participants in the study (p. 23) will subsequently begin to satisfy the criterion of educative authentication (p. 22). The penultimate criterion in Lincoln and Guba's second group, catalytic authentication (p. 24), relates to the dissemination of the research and the transformative action that arises from it. As mentioned earlier, I see this study as the potential precursor to a more action-oriented project – I am not seeking to effect any direct change on culture or practice at this stage, but rather to observe and listen; however, the findings I generate will be shared with the senior leadership team and the governing body, providing them with an invaluable insight into the lived experience of teachers and students and the extent to which they feel restricted and disempowered. This, in turn, may generate changes in policy at the school level. The final criterion in Lincoln and Guba's second group, tactical authenticity (p. 24), is concerned with the extent to which any changes brought about by research will be effective, which Lincoln and Guba connect with matters of empowerment and impoverishment: they hold that for change to be effective it must result in empowerment. I believe my commitment to a dialogic approach, which has its roots in the empowerment of marginalized voices, satisfies this criterion.

## **5. Data analysis**

I will use a deductive approach (The Open University, 2019b) to analyse the data gathered as part of this project; this is because I have already identified key themes building towards a critical hypothesis as part of my literature review. Data will be coded in accordance with these key themes, which will be gathered under the two RQs; however, I will need to ensure that I do not disregard any data that conflict with the position I outlined in Section A (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017), so a process of 'constant comparison' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p. 473) will be built into the study. Given the large amount of data that will be generated through my audio recordings of interviews and group dialogues, it will not be possible to create verbatim transcriptions, owing to the time-consuming nature of this task (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017); I will, however, create summaries of all recordings and provide verbatim transcriptions of short episodes of dialogue or interview responses that reflect key themes (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). I will store all data digitally for ease of access, and, whilst I will not have access to specialist qualitative analysis software, I will make use of the 'tagging' and organizing functionality of widely available software such as Microsoft OneNote to catalogue my data.

## **6. Ethical considerations**

Stutchbury and Fox (2009) offer a useful framework for analysing the ethical implications of a research study: building on work by Seedhouse (1998) and Flinders (1992), their framework consists of a comprehensive list of reflective questions grouped under four ethical parameters, outlined in the table below:

<b>Ethical parameter</b>	<b>Consideration</b>
Ecological	The environment in which the study is taking place
Consequential	Generating the most good for the greatest number of people
Deontological	Adhering to basic moral standards such as honesty
Relational	Maintenance of relationships with those involved with the study

I will briefly outline the key ethical issues arising from my study under these four categories, with reference to the prompt questions suggested by Stutchbury and Fox.

### *Ecological ethics*

I am proposing to undertake this research within the organization in which I already work, so I already have a good understanding of the internal culture, logistical and operational systems and staffing structure, which will enable me to maintain a high degree of ethical sensitivity. A key concern will be to ensure that my proposed study causes minimal disruption to the smooth running of the school; consequently, I will run research group meetings after the completion of the teaching day and therefore no teacher or student participants will miss lesson time at any point during the study. When interviewing senior staff members, I will restrict the time slot to thirty minutes in order not to impose too great a demand on their time and thus impinge on the smooth operational running of the school. Another key concern in this area will be how my research is perceived by the wider school community (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009): it will be important to make sure that the community are aware of my research project – this could be easily achieved by describing the project in a whole-staff meeting.

### *Consequential ethics*

I believe that my study has the potential to bring benefit to all involved. With regard to teacher participants, engaging in reflective dialogue about their professional experience in a supportive atmosphere has the potential to be both cathartic and educational: participants can learn from each other's experiences, and perhaps even cultivate positive relationships and collective

strength. In the case of students, engaging in group dialogue will be a valuable learning experience in and of itself, since speaking and listening skills are a key element of functional literacy and the English curriculum. Students may also derive benefit from having a chance to voice their opinions in an open and honest environment, in the knowledge that such views and insights will be taken very seriously. The study has the potential to reveal important insights about the experiences of both staff and students and could lead to positive policy changes; however, any potential positive effects will need to be weighed against negative effects on participants – for example, asking teachers to discuss their experiences around issues of freedom and agency may prove emotionally distressing for participants in some cases (The Open University, 2019c). Additionally, teacher participants may raise concerns regarding how negative comments about the school will be reported and whether this will impact on them professionally (The Open University, 2019c): this is arguably the biggest ethical dilemma posed by the project since the wider school will be aware of which staff are involved in the study. A solution here would be to use pseudonyms for all participants in the report, and to allow all participants to engage in ‘member checks’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017, p. 645) of my notes and transcriptions throughout the study. Regarding student participants, I will ensure that I uphold the school’s safeguarding policy at all stages of the study: there is a possibility that students in the research group may reveal information suggesting a safeguarding concern, or comments that directly constitute a disclosure - any such information will be reported to the school’s Designated Safeguarding Lead as quickly as possible.

### *Deontological ethics*

Informed consent will be essential. It will be vitally important to ensure that all participants are fully aware of the aims of the study and their commitments to it, so an information leaflet will be given to all prospective participants prior to the granting of consent. In accordance with article 24 of the BERA ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018), in the case of student participants, consent will need to be given by a parent or guardian, so letters will need to be sent home and replies will need to be chased: I will use the autumn term for this, as I will not be working with students until the spring term. Article 23 of the BERA guidelines (BERA, 2018), however, stresses the importance of gaining consent from the student participants themselves – so I will not assume that parental consent alone is sufficient: this is another reason why it will be vital to explain the study and its aims clearly to all prospective student participants. In accordance with article 31 of the BERA ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018), I must also ensure that all participants are fully aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, as well as of

how the research will be disseminated; it will also be important that an opportunity is given for participants to review a draft of the report before it is published. Given that I am asking for staff members and students to recount autobiographical experiences, it is crucial that I report these in a transparent and honest manner (The Open University, 2019c), and endeavour not to cloud these with my own values (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017); additionally, following article 21 of the BERA code, it will also be important to consider that such data will likely implicate individuals not directly involved in the study, and that, despite anonymization, these individuals may be identifiable through their relationship to participants – for this reason, consent may need to be sought from certain individuals mentioned in the study (BERA, 2018).

### *Relational ethics*

This area is particularly important considering that I am carrying out a study with colleagues and students, several of whom I am likely to have existing professional or pedagogical relationships with which will need to continue after the completion of the project. It will be crucial to maintain relationships of trust and respect throughout the study: this will be achieved by being open and honest about the study at all stages, cultivating a group ethos, and encouraging participants to see themselves as co-researchers. I have already outlined how I intend to ensure the credibility of my work– this will be particularly important when presenting findings to senior stakeholders who will need to feel confident in the validity of the findings. In accordance with article 19 of the BERA ethical guidelines (BERA, 2018), when working with the teacher group, I will also need to be aware of my own status as middle leader and that this will therefore constitute a power imbalance with most participants: there is the potential that my seniority could cause feelings of vulnerability in some participants (The Open University, 2019c) and therefore a reluctance to be truly honest: it will be crucial to mitigate any negative effects of this as my study relies on the honest reporting of the experiences of teachers and students.

*4069 words*

*Total for introduction, Section A and Section B: 12000 words*

### **Postscript: Narrative critical reflection**

Whilst dialogic pedagogy and the critical examination of the education policy landscape have remained constant focuses across both TMAs for this module, my intentions for the research proposal have changed significantly. This change came about following feedback from my tutor on an early chapter draft: I was advised that the political elements of my review-in-progress did not match my research questions (Appendix 1, example 6), which meant I either needed to change the focus of the literature review or alter the research proposal to bring it more in line with the topic area I was exploring. Given that I have been interested in critical education theory since first encountering it early in EE831, and had always intended to use this dissertation as an opportunity to explore this further, I felt that removing the political critique would mean abandoning the project as I had conceived it, therefore the only recourse was to change my proposed study. Following guidance from my tutor (e.g., Appendix 1, examples 2, 7, 10), I re-imagined my research proposal around testing whether the critical arguments that I present in the literature review hold true in my own setting.

My tutor helped me to see that despite the strong convictions I hold regarding the material I discuss in the literature review, the position I put forward is in fact a hypothesis, and I should not assume that my own views are shared by others in the profession (Appendix 1, example 10). Reflecting on this, having completed the work, I feel that my initial approach to writing the paper was somewhat inverted: I prioritized the literature review over the research design, and, while I now feel that the two sections of the dissertation align reasonably well, the project initially took the form of a long critical essay on a topic I am interested in, and not necessarily a literature review in preparation for a small-scale study.

Another problem I have faced, reflected in my tutor feedback for TMA02 as well as my dissertation chapter drafts (Appendix 1, example 9), is that my critical argument is based on the opposition between authoritative/monologic pedagogy and democratic/dialogic pedagogy;

however, I have not always been clear on how I have arrived at this dichotomy, or precisely how it maps onto the political continuum in the way that I claim. Feedback from my tutor caused me to question my assumptions and challenged me to explain these matters with greater clarity; it also alerted me to the fact that I was perhaps applying theory too broadly and uncritically to the real-world context.

Whilst my understanding of research methodology and ethics has improved significantly over the course of E822, the issue of positionality was raised in feedback from both TMAs and my dissertation chapter drafts (Appendix 1, example 12). I have not always made my positionality clear when discussing proposed research, so I attempted to remedy this in the dissertation by articulating my critical position at the outset and linking this to my own practice.

499 words

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## Appendix 1: Reflection evidence grid

Category	Feedback received	How did this shape my dissertation?
Knowledge and understanding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>You contextualise the issue within the wider socio-political context building upon your previous work. It will be interesting to see how this aspect will be discussed in future writings for the dissertation. (TMA02 feedback)</i></li> <li>2. <i>It seems you're really interested in the philosophical and sociological aspects of schooling and whether there is a relationship with 'democracy'. I think you see schooling in very much the way Foucault sees it, as an aspect of governmentality, a range of strategies to keep people 'governable' (draft chapter feedback)</i></li> <li>3. <i>Refer specifically to parts of the BERA Code (draft chapter feedback)</i></li> </ol>	<p>A large part of the literature review is dedicated to critical analysis of this wider socio-political context: I envisaged Section A as building from my EE831 EMA.</p> <p>This was a crucial realization which helped me to refine the scope of the literature review and settle on an idea for the research project.</p> <p>I responded to this by making several references to the BERA code in Section B.</p>

	<p>4. <i>I was surprised that in this section no mention was made of the 'power theorists', Foucault and Bourdieu because I don't think they mention pedagogy at all though their work clearly illuminates how power operates in Western societies</i> (draft chapter feedback)</p> <p>5. <i>I didn't have a sense that you understood 'cognitive' theories of learning</i></p> <p>6. <i>Reduce the political element of this because it doesn't match the RQs.</i></p>	<p>This comment led me to exploration of Foucault's work on disciplinary technologies, which I found illuminating and incorporated into my critique of the current policy landscape.</p> <p>This led to research into cognitive load theory which informs much of Part 3; I realized that I needed to clearly illustrate the differences between cognitive and social/constructivist views of learning in order to substantiate my critical position.</p> <p>This caused a re-think of my research intentions and challenged me to develop a stronger argument</p>
<b>Critical analysis and evaluation</b>	<p>7. <i>The case you make is clear but flawed and indeed rather deterministic since it implies that anything you try to do to develop pedagogy in a particular way is likely to fail for structural reasons</i> (draft chapter feedback)</p> <p>8. <i>Make sure you're constantly bringing a critical and fair eye on what you read</i> (draft chapter feedback)</p> <p>9. <i>Perhaps you could briefly explain how the dialogic pedagogy is epistemologically opposed to the dominant neoliberal education culture.</i></p>	<p>This informed my decision to change the planned research proposal as I realized that the case I was making in the literature conflicted with the research I was planning and also influenced my concluding paragraphs in which I suggest that a more nuanced outlook based on compromise.</p> <p>I feel I maintain a critical stance throughout; however, I have not always been critical enough of sources that support my own views – I tried to remedy this by critiquing the work of Alexander in Part 6 of Section A.</p> <p>I endeavour to explain this idea in Section A by reference to the monologic orientation of conventional pedagogy; however, I subsequently deleted the direct reference to this point that initially began my literature review, partly because – after tutor feedback – the position I have arrived at is more nuanced: this is outlined in the final paragraphs of Section A.</p>
<b>Links to professional practice</b>	<p>10. <i>Maybe you could discuss here how these power differentials could be addressed within the given research design</i> (TMA02 feedback)</p> <p>11. <i>How do you know how your colleagues teach and what real constraints they face and how they exercise agency?</i> (draft chapter feedback)</p>	<p>I addressed this issue when describing my research design in Section B.</p> <p>Again, another challenging statement that caused me to rethink my assumptions and re-assess the strength of the argument I was building; this also fed into my research design.</p>
<b>Structure, communication, and presentation</b>	<p>12. <i>Great to see that the critical theory paradigm will inform your framework. Further referencing of the material to discuss your positioning in the research and the implication that the specific paradigm could have on your research would have deepened the writing</i> (TMA01 feedback)</p> <p>13. <i>It would be helpful...to explicitly discuss how each one of the sources shape your thinking and potential research focus. This is not always evident in the discussion that follows</i> (TMA01 feedback)</p> <p>14. <i>Overall, further referencing of the module material would have given this assignment a higher mark</i> (TMA01 feedback)</p>	<p>I have tried to make my positionality clear from the outset and refer back to it several times; I also directly link my critical position to my direct experiences in the classroom in Part 2 of Section A.</p> <p>I made sure to refer to my research questions several times throughout Section A and endeavoured to show how these questions emerge from many of the sources/issues I reviewed.</p> <p>I refer extensively to E822 module material in Section B, and the entire focus of the project emerged from my study of the EE831 module material, which features a unit on dialogic pedagogy.</p>

## Appendix 2: E822 ethical appraisal form

# E822 Ethical Appraisal Form

Masters: Education, Childhood and Youth

**NB: it should be noted that The Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences students might encounter when undertaking 'in-person' data collection. It is therefore very important that you follow appropriate research protocols not least in seeking Gatekeepers' permissions to undertake**



**Because ethical appraisal should precede data collection, this form should be included with TMA02 for those developing a Small-Scale Investigation and included as part of the submission for the EMA for those submitting an Extended Literature Review and Research Proposal.**

**any data collection within your setting and adhere to ethical principles for the safety of yourself and your participants.**

Fill in section 1 of this document with your personal details and brief information about your research.

For section 2, please assess your research using the following questions and click yes or no as appropriate. If there is any possibility of significant risk please tick yes. Even if your list contains all “no” you should still return your completed checklist so your tutor/supervisor can assess the proposed research.

Section 1: Project details			
a.	Student name	James Marsh	
b.	PI		
c.	Project title	A critical investigation into the influence of neoliberal education reform on pedagogy, freedom, and agency within a UK secondary school	
d.	Supervisor/tutor	Dr Ray Chatwin	
e.	Qualification	Masters in Education	✓
		Masters in Childhood and Youth	
f.	MA pathway (where applicable)		
g.	Intended start date for fieldwork	N/A (EP option)	
h.	Intended end date for fieldwork	N/A (EP option)	
i.	Country fieldwork will be conducted in <i>If you are resident in the UK and will be conducting your</i>	UK	

	<i>research abroad please check <a href="http://www.fco.gov.uk">www.fco.gov.uk</a> for advice on travel.</i>	
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Section 2: Ethics Assessment		Yes	No
1	Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a 'gatekeeper' (e.g. Local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)?	✓	
2	Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a 'police check' or appropriate level of 'disclosure' before carrying out your research? <sup>1</sup>		✓
3	Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. <sup>2</sup>	✓	
4	Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in nonpublic places)? If so have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures? <sup>3</sup>		✓
5	Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through? <sup>4</sup>		✓
6	Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so have you indicated how you will protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data?	✓	
7	Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data?	✓	

<sup>1</sup> You must agree to comply with any ethical codes of practice or legal requirements that maybe in place within the organisation or country (e.g. educational institution, social care setting or other workplace) in which your research will take place. If required an appropriate level of disclosure ('police check') can be obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales), Disclosure Scotland, AccessNI (Northern Ireland), Criminal Records Office (Republic of Ireland), etc.

<sup>2</sup> This should normally involve the use of an information sheet about the research and what participation will involve, and a signed consent form. You must allow sufficient time for potential participants to consider their decision between the giving of the information sheet and the gaining of consent. No research should be conducted without the opt-in informed consent of participants or their caregivers. In the case of children (individuals under 16 years of age) no research should be conducted without a specified means of gaining their informed consent (or, in the case of young children, their assent) and the consent of their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This is particularly important if your project involves participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16 years, people with learning disabilities, or emotional problems, people with difficulty in understanding or communication, people with identified health problems). There is additional guidance on informed consent on the Masters: Education and Childhood and Youth website under Project Resources.

<sup>3</sup> Where an essential element of the research design would be compromised by full disclosure to participants, the withholding of information should be specified in the project proposal and explicit procedures stated to obviate any potential harm arising from such withholding. Deception or covert collection of data should only take place where it has been agreed with a named responsible person in the organisation and it is essential to achieve the research results required, where the research objective has strong scientific merit and where there is an appropriate risk management and harm alleviation strategy.

<sup>4</sup> Where participants are involved in longer-term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times should be considered.

8	Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants?		✓
9	Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants' confidentiality?	✓	
10	Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a 'risk analysis' and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research?		✓
11	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		✓
12	Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data?		✓

If you answered 'yes' to questions **12**, you will also have to submit an application to an appropriate National Research Ethics Service ethics committee (<http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/>).