Teachers' discourses around accountability measures and low-attaining pupils: how an economic model of education has commoditised children.

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Abstract

In a bid to raise standards in education, policy has defined an accountability system for schools including Ofsted inspections, league tables and teacher performance management, that is underpinned by high-stakes testing. Pupils that fall below expected levels are regarded as 'low-attaining' and contribute to data which suggest schools have not met required standards.

The present research explored GCSE teachers' discourses around accountability measures and low-attaining pupils, and how these discourses upheld and/or challenged the structures in place that enable the system. A focus group was conducted with seven teachers who taught Year 11 in a high-performing secondary school. The transcript was analysed using Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional framework; a procedure for Critical Discourse Analysis. This framework required analysis at a micro-, meso- and macro- level, the latter of which was done using a Marxist lens.

The findings illuminated three overarching discourses: 'the 'high-stakes' nature of accountability measures is pervasive and all consuming', 'low-attaining pupils are problematic, with little value' and 'the structures in place that enable the system are upheld through avoidance'. The Marxist analysis proposed that the marketisation of schools has led to pupils being seen as commodities, with exam data as currency. This has led to differing levels of value being placed on pupils depending on the data they are able to produce. This has resulted in low-attaining pupils being seen as having little value, and not worthy of investment. The analysis suggests that this view of pupils contradicts teachers' value systems creating cognitive dissonance, which they are motivated to reduce to continue working in the current education environment, ultimately upholding the structures in place.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

The English education system has undergone significant reform since the 1980s, which has been largely influenced by neoliberalism, globalisation and international economic competition (Ball, 2008; Ireson & Hallam, 2001; Stevenson & Wood, 2013). 'Setting standards' has become central to this conceptualisation of education (Wood, 2019) and resulted in the creation of accountability measures to measure and track school performance, including the creation of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), and the development of high-stakes testing, league tables and greater accountability for individual teachers through performance management (Hutchings, 2015; Leckie & Goldstein, 2016).

The changes in education policy, driven by political ideologies, has resulted in certain social goals and human qualities being valued over others, and has conceptualised specific ideals of desirable pupil outcomes (Ball, 2008; Reid & Valle, 2004). The transformation of educational policy has been underpinned by the technological developments achieved during the 20th century, which created an economic infrastructure where the majority of 'wealth-creating' work is dependent on information and knowledge. As a consequence, current education policies position the acquisition of information and knowledge above all other areas of child development (Ball, 2008). Presently, schools are required to strive for their pupils to meet a certain standard of academic attainment, as measured by high-stakes testing (Hutchings, 2015; Leckie & Goldstein, 2016). Pupils that fall below expected levels

are regarded as 'low-attaining' and contribute to data which suggest schools have not met required standards.

GCSE results have shown a consistent achievement gap between vulnerable pupils and all other pupils, which has remained largely unchanged since 2011. In particular, children considered disadvantaged, eligible for free school meals (FSM), and with special educational needs (SEN) are lower-attaining than children not in these groups (DfE, 2019a). Schools containing higher proportions of these pupils are said to be 'penalised', appearing lower on school league tables and more likely to be judged as 'inadequate' by Ofsted (Gill, 2018). Teachers of these pupils are also at risk of not receiving pay rises, due to performance-related pay. Therefore, current accountability measures position low-attaining pupils as a threat to the perceived success and financial status of teachers and schools.

The present research sought to investigate how the power hierarchies in education policy and accountability measures used to monitor schools and teachers, have impacted on GCSE teachers' discourses regarding low-attaining pupils. The discourses used by members at the top of power hierarchies can be internalised by those at the bottom, which in turn maintains power relations (Fairclough, 2010). Teachers' attitudes and beliefs are critical to ensure the success of inclusive practices in schools (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002), with Reid and Valle (2004) proposing that what individuals think, influences what they do. Therefore, exploring these power relations will help to understand how best to support schools in raising standards for all pupils, including those categorised as 'low-attaining'.

1.2. Low-attaining pupils

Education in England is strongly influenced by the concept of pupil 'ability'. The intelligence testing movement encouraged a belief that children's intelligence can be measured and their potential achievement predicted. Intelligence is typically seen as an innate ability which is fixed and results in a limit to children's capacity to learn, regardless of environment and/or teaching (Ireson & Hallam, 2001). There have been arguments that the field of psychology should move away from this positivist perception of ability, towards a social constructionist epistemology of practice. This is based on the view that intelligence is a social construct based on current human perspectives and knowledge (Fox, 2003; Moore, 2005). This is highlighted by the fact that understanding of intelligence has changed dramatically since Spearman (1927) first proposed the concept of 'general intelligence'. Research has demonstrated that there are multiple influences on what is considered 'intelligence' (Beckmann, 2006; Furnham et al., 2009; Mayer, 2015; Stanovich & West; 2014), which are not necessarily 'fixed' and cannot be objectively measured. Despite this, the British education system arguably still functions under the paradigm that ability is fixed and that knowledge is equivalent to facts that can be learned and examined (Stringer et al., 1997).

The current education system's concept of 'ability' is problematic when considering the groups of children who are often considered as 'low-ability'. Children from low socio-economic backgrounds, looked after children, minority-ethnic groups and children with SEN, have been found to be over-represented in low-ability sets (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007; Cliton & Cook, 2012; Dunne et al, 2007; Kutnick et al., 2005; Mazenod et al., 2019; Webster & Blatchford, 2017). GCSE data has consistently highlighted that children in vulnerable groups

attain lower than their peers. Vulnerable groups include children classified as 'disadvantaged' (those who have been eligible for FSM in the past six years, recorded as 'looked after' for at least 1 day or adopted into care), and children with SEN (see Figure 1 for a comparison of the average Attainment 8 score by pupil characteristics; DfE, 2019a)

The notion of 'ability', based on invalid measures, has historically contributed to discriminatory ideas and practices around disadvantaged groups (Herrnstein & Murray, 1996; Jensen, 1969). Accepting GCSE data as an accurate measure of ability is to say that disadvantaged children lack the innate capability to do well. It is the author's belief that the notion of 'ability', as measured through national testing, continues to be damaging to pupils and is based on a flawed assessment system that is biased against children who are disadvantaged. As such, this paper will refer to pupil 'attainment' instead of 'ability'.

Figure 1
Average Attainment 8 score by pupil characteristics (DfE, 2019a)
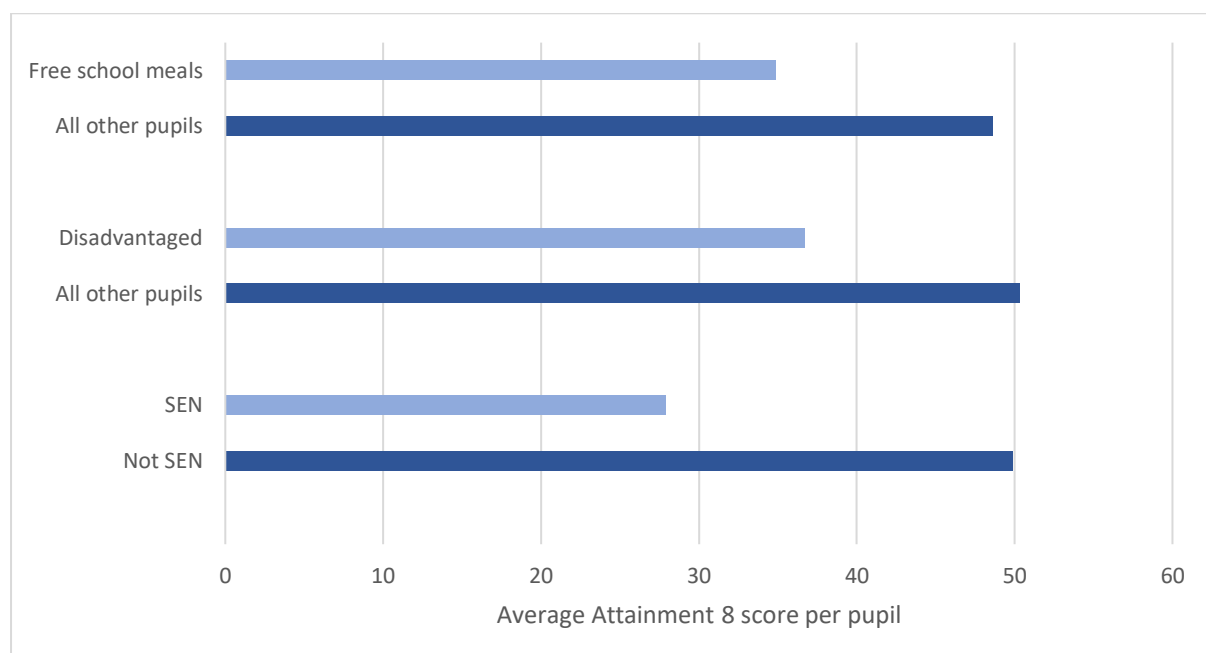
1.3. Accountability measures

The 1988 Education Reform Act, introduced a number of significant changes to the English education system including the national curriculum and a national system of testing pupils. The introduction of the act was influenced by the 'neoliberal movement' of English education (Stevenson, 2011), which paved the way for a system of accountability for schools including Ofsted, league tables and teacher performance management, underpinned by high-stakes testing (Hutchings, 2015; Leckie & Goldstein, 2016). Over the last three decades, these accountability measures have been refined, impacting on the way schools are managed and children are taught, especially in exam years.

1.3.1. Neoliberalism within education

Neoliberalism can be described as an ideology which promotes the notion of individual responsibility and self-interest by creating an open market for public services. It advocates that creating a competitive market leads to an increase in efficiency and effectiveness (Stevenson, 2011; Williams, 2017).

In terms of English education, neoliberalism encourages individual schools to both compete for and generate resources based on economic principles (Williams, 2017). Setting 'standards' is essential to this process as they become the tools by which school performance can be assessed to construct a notion of 'quality' (Wood, 2019). There has thus been a shift towards 'performativity', in an attempt to quantify the achievement of pupils and the outputs of teachers (Stevenson & Wood, 2013; Williams, 2017). This is achieved by assessing children through high-stakes exams, which are subsequently used to rank and compare schools (Winter, 2017).

Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government's educational policies have been described as key to the neoliberal movement (Stevenson, 2011). The introduction of a national curriculum to support national testing and league tables allowed parents to compare schools and provided them with the opportunity to choose a school for their child in the 'education market'.

The education market works through a policy of parental choice, whereby parents have the choice of applying to the school they wish their child to attend, based on publicly available school league tables (determined by exam results) and Ofsted reports. Schools are funded according to the number of pupils enrolled and are therefore incentivised to attract as many pupils as possible. Schools with low enrolment numbers suffer financially (Stevenson, 2011).

The New Labour government between 1997 and 2010 built on this policy, encouraged by the global market economy and growing 'knowledge economy'. Increased focus was placed on 'outputs' with an emphasis on educational objectives considered appropriate. In particular, the focus on school competition was strengthened. Where 'market failure' occurred, in which parents chose to remain loyal to their community schools regardless of league table positioning, the inspection system was available to intercede. The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010-2015) placed ever greater faith in the education market system. They reduced the amount of state control and encouraged the privatisation of schools by extending the academisation of schools and developing free-schools (Ball, 2008; Kulz, 2017; Stevenson, 2011; Stevenson & Wood, 2013).

1.3.2. The English system of accountability

National tests are used as the main indicator of school performance. For secondary schools, this is via GCSE exams, which are taken at the end of Year 11 (Ofqual, 2019). The GCSE results data inform league table positioning of schools, which is published annually. School positioning is determined through a variety of measures, including Attainment 8 and Progress 8, which places weight on certain GCSE subjects over others (DfE, 2020a).

Ofsted is responsible for conducting inspections in schools and publishing reports of their findings. It aims to provide an independent, external evaluation of the school's effectiveness and a diagnosis of what to improve. Ofsted reports are made publicly available to help parents make informed school choices (Ofsted, 2013). Ofsted uses a range of data to inform inspections, including published national performance data as a starting point for their inspections (Ofsted, 2019).

In 2013 the government abolished automatic pay progression for all classroom teachers and introduced performance-related pay. Schools must annually consider whether to increase the salary of each individual teacher based on their performance (DfE, 2019c; Sharp et al, 2017). Schools can therefore withhold pay progression for teachers who are assessed through the appraisal system as underperforming.

Appendix A provides a more detailed overview of the English National testing programme and accountability system.

1.4. The paradox of accountability measures

The accountability measures described above were designed to raise standards in education. Fielding (1999) described this as an 'assumption' which lacked evidence. Indeed, subsequent research evidence suggests that accountability measures are not effective at raising standards, can incentivise a poorer level of education for some groups, and lead to a widening of the achievement gap (Brill et al., 2018).

1.4.1. Success dependent on failure

It can be argued that it is impossible to raise standards for all schools in an education system based on neoliberalism, where schools are required to compete in the education marketplace. This system defines success based on the failure of others, meaning the system requires failure.

Exam grade boundaries are calculated using what Ofqual (2014) describes as 'statistical predictions'. This is described as a mixture of criterion-referenced and norm-referenced approaches. A criterion-referenced approach judges pupils' work against descriptors of expected performance, whereas norm-referenced sets a predetermined proportion of grades that can be awarded to a particular cohort. The inclusion of a norm-referenced approach makes it impossible for all children to receive a pass mark, as some children are required to fail. The GCSE 'pass mark' does not set a minimum requirement of what they want children to achieve, instead setting a standard of the percentage of children that need to be surpassed (Mannion, 2017). Ofqual (2014) highlighted that it was the Government's intention for criteria-related grades to be introduced as soon as practicable, but despite

"heroic efforts" (p.6), it has not been possible, showing an acknowledgement of flaws in the current system.

Similarly, it can be argued that league tables are not only based upon a flawed system of exam grades, but also upon a hierarchical ranking system where there will always be schools at the top and at the bottom. As a result, league table success for schools is dependent upon the failure of others (Lefstein, 2013). This incentivises schools to recruit pupils who will add the most 'value' to a school's status, i.e. pupils who will perform well in exams. Schools with a high rank in the league tables are able to do this, leaving neighbouring lower ranking schools to take pupils who do not perform as well in exams. This breeds further inequalities, rather than raising educational standards for children (Stevenson, 2011).

1.4.2. The impact of accountability measures on learning

By creating a system of accountability based on outputs measured by data, it can be argued that the primary objective of schools is no longer for pupils to learn or attain knowledge, but to pass exams. Meeting relevant performance metrics has become essential to schools' long-term survival, impacting on the learning experiences of pupils. The high-stakes nature of accountability measures, reliant on exam grades, has resulted in 'fear' being central to many educational discourses (Jackson, 2010) and has led to schools adopting a range of strategies that has been detrimental to pupil outcomes (House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee [HoCCSFC], 2008; Hutchings, 2015; Taylor, 2016).

 The publication of school league tables based on exam grades has led schools to focus their resources on maximising the number of pupils achieving a 'passing' grade (Taylor, 2016).

This prompted schools to develop strategies including directing resources at borderline pupils; intensive revision sessions; ability setting; and teaching to the test (Dunn & Darlington, 2016; HoCCSFC, 2008; Hutchings, 2015).

The pressure of accountability measures on schools has also resulted in practices such as 'cheating' or 'gaming' (Hutchings, 2015). It has been reported that low-attaining pupils are tactically overlooked (Dunn & Darlington, 2016) and described as a "resource burden" who are "a drag on the school attainment figures" (Hutchings, 2015, p. 62). Therefore, rather than improving the quality of learning, accountability measures have directly contributed to an arguably poorer standard of teaching and education, especially for those pupils judged as low-attaining.

1.4.3. The inequalities of accountability measures

Reid and Valle (2004) highlighted that historically, despite well-meaning intentions, political visions have not served all sections of the population equally well. Stevenson and Wood (2013) were less generous, suggesting that educational reforms have not been made with the best interests of all children in mind at all, but instead were driven by the interests of business and the desire to increase privatisation in education. Regardless of the intentions, accountability measures have been found to penalise schools serving vulnerable children and communities.

Schools in economically deprived areas and with high levels of SEN appear lower on league tables and are more likely to be judged as 'inadequate' by Ofsted. The introduction of Progress 8 was meant to rectify this effect and provide a 'fairer' way to measure school

performance by tracking progress rather than basing success on purely meeting a baseline grade (Gill, 2018). However, there are suggestions that Progress 8 is still biased towards selective schools (Allen, 2016; Andrews, 2017). Certain groups of pupils improve less than others, such as those on FSM and those eligible for pupil premium (Andrews, 2017; Gill, 2018; Sherrington, 2017; Thomson, 2017). Schools that enrol pupils that are lower performing are "systematically penalised" by Progress 8 (Gill, 2018). Furthermore, despite revisions to the Ofsted inspection framework to reduce inequalities, schools with more pupils from deprived backgrounds are still less likely to be judged 'good' by Ofsted than those from more affluent backgrounds (Roberts & Hill, 2020).

Gill (2018) argues that it would be fairer if contextual factors were considered when calculating school performance measures. In fact, the Government had introduced 'contextual value added' in 2006, which was later scrapped in 2010. The measure was calculated on not only pupils' KS2 test scores, but also factors such as their gender, ethnicity, SEN status and FSM eligibility (Leckie & Goldstein, 2016). The reason given for abandonment was that the public found it difficult to understand and it was a weaker predictor of success than raw attainment measures (DfE, 2010). However, it was pointed out by Leckie and Goldstein (2016) that the government did not cite research to support this claim. They contend that by not adjusting for differences in schools' intakes, accountability measures will continue to penalise schools serving educationally disadvantaged communities, and reward those serving advantaged ones.

1.5. Research rationale

Education is a social practice (Duveen, 2013) and has been argued to reflect the beliefs and values of those participating within it (Williams, 2017). As such, language becomes a medium through which those beliefs and values are transmitted. The neoliberal framework has created discourses of marketisation, managerialism and performativity which have the power to shape teachers' experiences, thoughts and feelings, and ultimately their actions (Fielding, 1999, Stevenson & Wood, 2013; Williams, 2017).

Discourses within society help to either sustain or potentially transform the social status quo and unequal power relations (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997) and thus can have a direct impact on the way low-attaining GCSE pupils are viewed and treated in schools governed by results-focused oversight. Current education policy measures school success through a variety of accountability measures, which largely revolve around the academic attainment of pupils as measured by high-stakes testing (Hutchings, 2015; Leckie & Goldstein, 2016).

Low-attainment is correlated with vulnerability; low-attaining pupils are often from vulnerable groups and end up with limited choices in terms of their future prospects. An accountability system that portrays low-attaining pupils as potential barriers to achieving success may create an internalised belief and value system that they are a burden, rather than a group that need high-quality education. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs are critical to ensure the success of inclusive practices in schools (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). It is therefore essential that the power relations and discourses within education are understood to ensure educational standards are set for all children, including those who are low-attaining. The present research sought to explore this by conducting a focus group of

Year 11 teachers and analysing their conversation using a critical discourse analysis with a

Marxist lens.

1.5.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Wood (2019) advised that to understand the processes of discourses, it is essential to

engage in a critical dialogue about wider socio-political systems that influence the

conditions of work and the lived experiences of it.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is based on the concept that discourses are a relatively

stable use of language that organise and structure social life (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Social

life is built through power hierarchies in a socio-economic system "built upon the

domination, exploitation and dehumanisation of people by people" (Fairclough, 2010, p.

304). CDA researchers are interested in the way discourse produces and reproduces social

domination by one group over others, and how dominated groups may discursively resist

such abuse (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). CDA suggests that the

discourses that take place between individuals are related to the situations, institutions and

social structures that frame them (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997).

CDA is able to identify how socially structured systems (such as education) can incorporate

ideas and values, and how they have evolved and are maintained (Wood, 2019). In this

study, the conversations that occur between teachers regarding low-attaining pupils were

considered in relation to the present time and situation, the specific school's environment,

and current education policy. By critically engaging with the wider socio-political system, the

influence of power relations was explored to show how these discourses were produced and sustained.

1.5.2. Marxism

Applying a theoretical lens provides a framework from which to explore the socio-political systems involved in the teachers' discourses. A Marxist lens was utilised to provide a critical framework to the neoliberal ideology that underpins capitalist principles.

Marxism is a social, political and economic theory devised by Karl Marx (Marx, 1976; Marx & Engels, 1888). The prevailing concept of Marxism is that of the struggle between the social classes in capitalist societies: the bourgeoisie (ruling-class) and the proletariat (working-class). Marx argued that the ruling-class exploits the working-class to maximise its own profits, maintain power and ultimately control society. As such, the ruling-class imposes its interests and ideologies on society as a whole, using social institutions as tools to control the working-class.

Marx depicted capitalism as an economic and social system based on trading commodities. Employees' labour is perceived as a form of commodity which makes them vulnerable to the fluctuations of the market. As a monetised commodity, an individual's unique qualities and skills are reduced to a quantitative value.

In the context of education and accountability measures, the government represents the members of the 'ruling-class', who set policies that reflect their own interests and ideologies. In the current knowledge-based economy, in which the most wealth is generated

by information and knowledge, (Ball, 2008), knowledge has become a desired 'commodity'. As such, successive governments have imposed their political values and ideologies influenced by neoliberalism onto the education system, where pupils and learning become a commodity. Under this system, low-attaining pupils are considered as lacking the essential required knowledge, and are therefore not deemed as valuable to society, as proposed by the ruling-class.

1.6. Research aims

The present research aimed to consider GCSE teachers' discourses around low-attaining pupils in relation to accountability measures as set out by education policy, applying a Marxist lens.

This research aimed to:

1. explore the discourses around accountability measures and low-attaining pupils

2. explore how the discourses uphold and/or challenge the structures in place that enable the system.

1.7. Summary

Current English education policies, shaped by neoliberal ideology, have created a competitive market for schools, which purports to increase standards. Accountability measures have been introduced as a means of measuring school performance, including

school league tables, performance management for teachers, and the establishment of Ofsted, all of which are underpinned by high-stakes testing.

There is evidence to suggest that these measures have detrimental impacts on pupils, especially those who are judged as low-attaining. The accountability measures in place encourage schools to focus on passing exams and maximising pupil grades, which results in low-attaining pupils viewed as evidence of poor performance. This is problematic considering that pupils judged as low-attaining are disproportionately represented by children from vulnerable populations. This includes children from low-income families, looked after children, and those assessed as having SEN.

This research aims to explore GCSE teachers' discourses around low-attaining pupils in relation to accountability measures set out by education policy. It seeks to explore how discourses at the top of the power hierarchy (government) permeate how teachers speak about their low-attaining pupils and its impact on their views, attitudes and teaching practice.

2. Literature Review

A comprehensive literature review was undertaken to explore the existing research on teachers' perceptions of accountability measures and low-attaining pupils. Initial searches found limited research in this area. In order to seek the widest breadth of research possible, two separate literature reviews were conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What does research say about teachers' perceptions of accountability measures?
2. What does research say about teachers' perceptions of low-attaining pupils?

2.1. Question 1: What does research say about teachers' perceptions of accountability measures?

2.1.1. Search strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted on 13th June 2020 using four databases: PsychINFO, PsyArticles, Education Source and ERIC.

Table 1 shows the search terms used to conduct the searches.

Table 1

Search terms entered into databases for literature review 1

Search 1		Search 2		Search 3
"accountability measure" OR	AND	Teacher	AND	attitude OR
"league table" OR				opinion OR
"progress 8" OR				perception OR
"performance related pay" OR				thought OR
"Ofsted" OR				discourse
"high stakes test"				

The search was then narrowed to focus on the UK context by adding a 'Geography: United Kingdom' limiter to ensure that these references were representative of the experiences of teachers in the United Kingdom. This resulted in 47 papers, a full list of which can be found in Appendix B.

The titles and abstracts of these papers were reviewed with the application of specific inclusion criteria, contained in Table 2.

Following the application of the inclusion criteria, a total of 20 papers were included, a list of which can be found in Appendix C.

Table 2

Inclusion criteria for literature review 1

Inclusion	Rationale	No. excluded
Empirical research papers only	To ensure papers are research rather than commentary pieces	9
Research conducted in the UK	To ensure research is relevant to the UK context	2
Paper's focus is on accountability measures	To ensure papers are relevant to the literature review question	9
Paper's focus is on teacher's views	To ensure papers are relevant to the literature review question	7

2.1.2. Evaluation of papers

The use of an appraisal tool is recommended when conducting a systematic literature review to consider the study's quality and bias, allowing for a methodical means of critique (Siddaway et al., 2019). As all included papers were qualitative, an appraisal tool suited to this methodology was chosen.

There is disagreement about the characteristics that define good quality qualitative research and whether even having criteria is appropriate, due to the positivist assumption that 'good' research can be defined (Dixon-Woods et al., 2004). Rather than using a tool to make definitive assessments as to research quality, an appraisal tool was used as a framework through which to explore the research. The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2018)

was chosen due to its ease of use and its focus on three areas of qualitative research: rigour, credibility and relevance (Chenail, 2011). These areas guide consideration of an article's quality whilst acknowledging that qualitative research is not a unified field and varies at both the level of data collection and methodological approach (Dixon-Woods et al., 2004).

The CASP (2018) has been criticised for not evaluating the intrinsic methodological quality of studies in comparison to other instruments (Hannes et al., 2010), although a systematic review of critical appraisal tools found no gold standard for any type of study design, and recommended that tools be selected for the individual users' needs (Katrak et al., 2004). As a result, the CASP was deemed appropriate for the purposes of this literature review.

2.1.3. Overview of literature

The research papers spanned 17 years, with the oldest published in 2002 (Chapman, 2002) and the most recent in 2019 (Gibbons, 2019; Kendall, 2019). Given there has been a large amount of policy change during this time, arguably, not all findings may be relevant to the current education context. However, the findings from the research were fairly homogenous with no noticeable differences between the older and latest papers. In fact, Coldwell and Willis (2017) highlighted this issue as their research focus was on the use of Level 6 tests at the end of KS2, which were subsequently abandoned before they published their research. They noted that the analysis of their findings could still be applied to other areas of the National Curriculum and tests, despite policy reforms. Upon reviewing the literature, this seemed to be the case with the majority of the findings, as despite policy reforms, accountability measures have continued to be driven by high-stakes testing.

The accountability measures covered most frequently were high-stakes testing (Coldwell & Willis, 2017; Collins et al., 2010; Dymoke, 2012; Gibbons, 2019; Kendall, 2019; Lambirth et al., 2012; Nicholl & McLellan, 2008; Taber et al., 2011; Troman et al., 2011; Winter, 2017). Due to the results of high-stakes tests underpinning the other accountability measures, these were often addressed in conjunction with performance management and Ofsted. Papers focusing on Ofsted (Chapman, 2002; Elton & Male, 2015; Lefstein, 2013; Lumb, 2014; Plowright, 2007; Williams, 2017) also frequently discussed high-stakes testing, again highlighting the dominance of tests within accountability measures. Noticeably, Progress 8 was not mentioned in any of the research papers, possibly due to its relatively recent introduction in 2016. This highlights a significant gap in the literature on accountability measures.

All of the research employed qualitative methods, with the most popular data collection tool being semi-structured interviews (Chapman, 2002; Coldwell & Willis, 2017; Dymoke, 2012; Elton & Male, 2015; Forrester, 2005; Guimaraes, 2016; Holmes, 2017; Kendall, 2019; Lambirth et al., 2012; Nicholl & McLellan, 2008; O'Leary, 2013; Plowright, 2007; Taber et al., 2011; Winter, 2017). Sample sizes tended to be small with several researchers taking a case-study approach (Coldwell & Willis, 2017; Lefstein, 2013; Plowright, 2007). Where exact sample sizes were reported, the majority of the papers fell between the range of five participants (Winter, 2017) and 42 (Troman et al, 2007) with the noticeable outlier of Collins et al (2010) who collected qualitative data from 74 participants through focus groups. Six of the papers supplemented their qualitative data with quantitative data from a wider sample of teaching staff (Chapman, 2002; Collins et al., 2010; Gibbons, 2019; Homes, 2017; Nicholl

& McLellan, 2008; Williams, 2017). This served as a way of triangulating findings from the more in-depth qualitative data to determine further generalisation.

The most common method of analysis was thematic analysis (Chapman, 2002; Coldwell & Willis, 2017; Forrester, 2005; Guimaraes, 2016; Kendall, 2019; Lambirth et al., 2012; Lumb, 2014; Williams, 2017; Winter, 2017). However, a significant proportion of the papers did not state their method of qualitative analysis (Gibbons, 2019; Holmes, 2017; Lefstein, 2013; O'Leary, 2013; Plowright, 2007), making it difficult to assess whether their data analysis was sufficiently rigorous when evaluating the quality of the research.

The main finding from implementing the CASP (see Appendix D for full breakdown) was that few researchers presented a consideration of their own role and potential bias within their analysis. This is particularly significant considering the highly political nature of the research presented. All of the papers conveyed a critical tone of the current education policy within the introduction and discussion of their papers, without explicitly stating their standing and viewpoint or considering how their outlook may impact on their analysis. Soobrayan (2003) suggested that qualitative researchers must consciously and deliberately engage with the ethical, truth and political implications of their research and writings, claiming that researchers take a political decision when choosing what to report. Within the literature explored, Elton and Male (2015) were the most successful at considering their motivators, recognising that the researcher's dual role as the school governor may have affected the research process. However, they considered this with regard to the impact it could have on their participants, rather than on the analysis of the data.

During the CASP evaluation, I rated all of the papers as being valuable, as they all illuminated teacher voices and contributed to the knowledge base on the subject of accountability measures. However, few papers commented on how their findings could be used. Where recommendations were made, some suggested further research and/or exploration (Guimaraes, 2016; Kendall, 2019; Lambirth et al., 2012; Lumb, 2014; Taber, 2011), but only four of the 20 papers made practical suggestions (Dymoke, 2012; Holmes, 2017; Lefsteif, 2013; O'Leary, 2013). This arguably highlights the difficulty of undertaking research in this subject area, as there is little that the authors and/or school staff can do to mediate the challenges caused by accountability measures, given the issues are with wider policies. For example, Holmes (2017) suggested that managers should focus on the intrinsic reasons of why teachers teach, rather than on the external pressures, although schools are required to abide by statutory requirements and demands. Dymoke (2012) suggested that teachers need to raise their concerns about the narrowing of the curriculum, which highlights the difficulties that teaching staff have in being able to make real change themselves, within a complex and flawed system.

The findings of the research papers fell into six themes, which will be discussed in turn.

1. Accountability measures accurately assessing schools

2. Accountability measures leading to school improvements

3. Cognitive dissonance

4. Staff wellbeing

5. Impact on young people

6. The benefits of accountability measures

2.1.3.1. Accountability measures accurately assessing schools

Included papers suggested that teachers were in favour of being held to account to drive improvement (Chapman, 2002; Coldwell & Willis, 2017; Forrester, 2005; Plowright, 2007; Troman et al., 2007); however, they raised concern as to whether the current accountability measures are, or were at the time of writing, able to successfully achieve this.

The reviewed literature was persistently critical of high-stakes testing, with teaching staff suggesting that they lack validity and are not an accurate indicator of pupil ability. Assessments were described as 'crude' and 'superficial' (Troman et al., 2007) and incapable of providing accurate information, as they encourage retention of knowledge in the short term, rather than measuring true understanding (Collins et al., 2010). There was also a proposition that early years baseline assessments are inaccurate, due to pressures to complete them within a certain timeframe (Guimaraes, 2016), suggesting that the tracking of progress over time may also be inaccurate. The lack of accuracy was stated to pertain particularly to children with SEN (Kendall, 2019), recently arrived migrants (Winter, 2017) and children living in disadvantaged areas (Troman et al., 2007; Winter, 2017). It was suggested that the lack of trust in results necessitated retesting all pupils at the start of Year 7 to obtain a more accurate representation of their attainment, capabilities and potential (Coldwell & Willis, 2017).

Tests were also criticised for their narrow focus, failing to provide a holistic representation of pupils' achievements (Collins et al., 2010; Dymoke, 2012; Forrester, 2005). Teachers were concerned that judging schools and pupils against results loses sight of the child as a 'whole person' (Forrester, 2005) and fails to reflect the 'real achievements' of pupils over their time

in primary school (Collins et al., 2010). It was suggested that due to the limitations of what tests are able to assess, some pupils are unable to demonstrate their achievements in certain areas. Dymoke (2012) gave the example of the WJEC exam board recommending that poetry not be used for GCSE English creative writing assessments because of the difficulty in assessing and comparing this writing form.

The validity of tests was also called into question due to schools using tactics to 'game' the system to improve exam results and their subsequent league table positioning (Coldwell & Willis, 2017; Nicholl & McLellan, 2008). Design and Technology (D&T) teachers admitted to 'fabricating evidence' to fulfil assessment criteria, with a teacher reporting "They come up with their final idea and work backwards and slip a few sheets in the folder. We do that. I don't know a school that doesn't." (Nicholl & McLellan, 2008, p.592). In Coldwell and Willis' (2017) research, teachers reported having an 'ulterior motive' to entering pupils into the then elective Level 6 tests at the end of Key Stage 2 to 'balance out' lower scores. This arguably disadvantaged these children as the Level 6 tests required further time and work in the core subjects, at the detriment of the children experiencing other subjects like history, geography and languages.

Ofsted ratings were also considered to be an invalid measure of a school's performance, unable to provide an accurate representation of how the school works and performs. The literature suggested that Ofsted inspections and reports lack validity as inspectors only see a snapshot of the school (Forrester, 2005) and are unrepresentative due to the amount of preparations schools dedicate to the leadup (Lefstein, 2013), with staff wondering "whether it is actually the most effective way of examining a school" (Chapman, 2002, p.261).

There were indications that Ofsted inspectors were not considered as consistent or reliable, with variations in the quality and quantity of the feedback provided, and the extent to which they considered the school context in their judgement (Chapman, 2002). Schools were found to disagree with Ofsted judgements, believing they were judged too harshly (Chapman, 2002; Elton & Male, 2015; Lefstein, 2013) or too leniently (Chapman, 2002). There was confusion amongst some staff over how judgements were made, with teachers surprised that their school received a failing score given two-thirds of the lessons were judged as 'good' or 'very good' (Lefstein, 2013). This suggests that Ofsted place more emphasis on data than what they actually witness. Elton and Male (2015) discovered that school staff believed in a conspiracy that Ofsted arrive at schools with an agenda to remove local authority control. The tensions between school staff and Ofsted was encapsulated in a quote from a senior manager: "I have no respect for Ofsted whatsoever" (Chapman, 2002, p.264).

Schools reported that Ofsted added little to their knowledge concerning their areas for improvement (Chapman, 2002). School staff were aware of their own strengths and weaknesses before Ofsted inspections (Chapman, 2002), but had to spend considerable time and effort providing data and paperwork to prove it to external stakeholders (Coldwell & Willis, 2017). There was a suggestion that inspectors could be better placed helping schools carry out their own self-evaluation rather than providing the evaluation themselves (Plowright, 2007).

In summary, included papers highlighted teachers' beliefs that high-stakes testing (which informs league tables) and Ofsted inspections lacked validity and did not provide a comprehensive or realistic assessment of schools.

2.1.3.2. Accountability measures leading to school improvements

The literature indicates that some school staff lack confidence that accountability measures are successful in holding schools to account.

Perceptions were shared that accountability measures lead to short term improvements rather than raising standards in the long-term (Chapman, 2002; Plowright, 2007), with one head of department describing changes as 'papering over the cracks' and admitting "we're not motivated to impress Ofsted, we're just motivated for them to go away and not come back" (Plowright, 2007, p.384). Classroom teachers claimed that Ofsted inspections made no difference to their teaching in real terms, complaining that they are not given feedback in any helpful way to allow change (Chapman, 2002). There was also a suggestion that inspections can have adverse effects, with effort exerted to put on a good lesson for an observation being at the expense of all other lessons delivered (Forrester, 2005).

There were complaints about the amount of time accountability measures take up, leaving less time to implement changes. The headteacher of a school placed in special measures reported that over 50% of his time was spent on accountability or preparing for accountability (Elton & Male, 2015). Classroom teachers also found the time demands on accountability administrative tasks a burden, taking them away from actual teaching and

learning, with one teacher explaining, "I haven't got time all day to write down all the things I do 'cos I'm too busy doing them" (Forrester, 2005, p.283).

The largest barrier to a lack of improvement seemed to be the subsequent drop in morale and motivation following accountability assessment (Chapman, 2002; Elton & Male, 2015; Troman et al., 2007). The allocation of grades for observations meant that rather than teachers viewing assessment as an opportunity for development, they felt it was punitive and an attack on their professional autonomy (O'Leary, 2013). There were also wider consequences for the school as following a failing grade, it became more challenging to recruit new staff and enlist new pupils, resulting in financial implications (Chapman, 2002).

There was evidence that scrapping accountability measures may actually lead to better outcomes and improvements in schools (Collins et al., 2010). In Wales, teachers considered that pupils were receiving a better science education following the withdrawal of the KS2 exams, as they were given freedom to explore true scientific enquiry rather than merely focusing on exam preparation (Collins et al., 2010). Teachers were also found not to be motivated by external pressures or meeting their performance management targets. Instead, they were driven to spend their non-directed time undertaking school-directed tasks by simply 'helping the students' (Holmes, 2017). Arguably, if teachers spent less time having to verify themselves, and were trusted to use their time to teach as they see fit, school improvement would happen naturally.

2.1.3.3. Cognitive dissonance

Another theme identified within the findings of included papers was 'cognitive dissonance' amongst teaching staff. Cognitive dissonance refers to the feeling of discomfort when a person's behaviours conflict with their attitudes and beliefs (Festinger, 1957). Across the studies, teachers reported engaging in teaching practices that they did not believe was best for their pupils. Trainee teachers disclosed they used summative assessments, although they believed formative assessments were best practice (Taber et al, 2011). D&T teachers described valuing creativity in the subject, but admitted not placing emphasis on this, as it was not essential for pupils to achieve good results (Nicholl & McLellan, 2008). There was also a dissonance in terms of pupil wellbeing; teachers prioritised assessment over wellbeing despite believing the latter to be more important (Guimaraes, 2016). Teachers also reported being asked to do things that directly conflicted with the caring aspects of teaching and learning that they valued (Forrester, 2005). The term "necessary evil" appeared in two separate papers (Gibbons, 2019; Taber et al, 2011), suggesting that teachers felt obliged to participate in practices that they perceived to be inappropriate. Williams (2017) found that a job specification for a head of PE role included a lot of performative language, even though it was recognised that personal attributes were much more important to the role.

Teachers directly linked these inadequate teaching practices to the existence of accountability measures. The pressure to deliver good test results meant that performance was valued over creativity, which was considered detrimental to pupils' education (Lumb, 2014; Nicholl & McLellan, 2008; Troman et al, 2007). One teacher dejectedly testified, "what are you gonna do?... you're gonna plan for the tests I'm afraid because if you get bad SATs

then your school is judged on that and you get hammered." (Forrester, 2005, p.279).

Teachers contemplated the many teaching opportunities that would open up to them if tests were abandoned, including no longer teaching to the test, questioning pupils to gauge understanding, allowing more exploration of the subject, and being able to deliver a balanced curriculum for science including investigations and practical activities (Collins et al., 2010).

The emphasis on performance encouraged by Ofsted was seen as detrimental, with senior leaders reporting that in the lead up to inspection, they adopted a more autocratic approach to leadership than they would like (Chapman, 2002). A head teacher of a faith school discussed the contrast in wanting to control the pedagogy to satisfy the demands of Ofsted and his personal desire to allow freedom to explore spirituality (Lumb, 2014). These demands were also present at the classroom level, with a teacher relaying the confusion and paranoia she felt following a comment by Ofsted, that contradicted with her concept of what makes good teaching:

> "Sometimes now when I am talking I feel upset about the fact that I am talking and thinking. Oh no, am I really a bad teacher, I'm talking to my kids? That's the effect it had, we're all desperate not to talk to them now" (Elton & Male, 2015, p.415).

2.1.3.4. Staff wellbeing

It is perhaps unsurprising that staff wellbeing was a theme in the literature, considering the cognitive dissonance teachers were faced with, between how they were expected to adhere to accountability measures, compared to how they would like to practice.

The word 'pressure' appeared in 19 out of the 20 papers reviewed and dominated the discourses of teachers and senior leaders. Teachers spoke of the increased workload accountability measures produced (Chapman, 2002; Winter, 2017) and the subsequent exhaustion it caused (Chapman, 2002; Elton & Male, 2015; Forrester, 2005). There was a sense of being constantly monitored, which was encapsulated in a quote from a teacher whose school was placed in special measures: "Now there's eyes everywhere… That pressure will make you slip up and make you do things you wouldn't normally do" (Elton & Male, 2015, p.416). The persistent monitoring led teaching staff to question their self-worth as professionals. Teachers spoke about having to 'prove themselves' and their 'competence' (Lefstein, 2013, p.) and to 'prove' that they were 'worth something' (Forrester, 2005). Teachers were unable to separate the observed lesson rating from their own personal performance, "fundamentally change[ing] the perceptions of self and their role within the school community" (Elton & Male, 2015, p.419).

It is interesting to note the strength of language used by teaching staff. The SATs process was described as a "nightmare" by one teacher (Kendall, 2019). The strongest use of language was reserved for Ofsted, with a teacher describing the observation process as "unnecessarily inhumane" (Chapman, 2002, p.263). The Ofsted inspection process caused high levels of stress. Teachers were quoted as saying "It was the most horrendous day" (Elton & Male, 2015, p.414); and "it was the most dreadful time for me… I found it the most stressful period that I've ever had in my life" (Chapman, 2002, p.265). This stress spilled over into their personal lives: "you take it all home […] it's a grind and a burden […] I feel out of control […] This is the first time I haven't gone home and cried all week." (Elton & Male, 2015, p.414). A head teacher of a school placed into special measures declared:

> "Which other professions go through this? It is a humiliating process and part of me thinks that if the government was truly focused on school improvement they could think of a much more effective and streamlined way of doing things. I think it's a sanitisation process and very similar to a form of ethnic cleansing in that you're seen to be a Special Measures school so as a result of that you will be put through this ritual. I think there is an element there of job justification and also an element of bayoneting the dead in that it's 'Oh well, they're fair game so we'll go in there and we'll be seen to be making them accountable'" (Elton & Male, 2015, p416)

Although the comparison to 'ethnic cleansing' could be seen as hyperbolic and bordering on the offensive, this reaction seems consistent with those from other studies, reflecting the level of stress and persecution felt by school staff taking part in a process that is meant to help improvement.

2.1.3.5. Impact on young people

The literature reviewed showed that teachers perceived accountability measures as having a negative effect on pupils' learning (Coldwell & Willis, 2017; Collins et al., 2010; Dymoke, 2012; Forrester, 2005; Gibbons, 2019; Lambirth et al., 2012; Lumb, 2014; Winter, 2017) and wellbeing (Chapman, 2002; Forrester, 2005; Taber et al, 2011; Troman et al, 2007; Winter, 2017), especially for those with SEN or other challenging circumstances (Kendall, 2019; Lefstein, 2013).

High-stakes testing was deemed responsible for narrowing the curriculum. Focus was given to English, Maths and Science at the expense of the humanities and arts, but also resulted in a narrow experience of core subjects (Coldwell & Willis, 2017; Dymoke, 2012; Forrester, 2005; Lambirth et al., 2012; Winter, 2017). Pupils' experience of education was reported to be dominated by teaching to the test, due to the pressure placed on teachers to deliver

results (Coldwell & Willis, 2017; Forrester, 2005; Gibbons, 2019; Lambirth et al., 2012; Winter, 2017). This style of teaching was perceived to result in pupils having limited knowledge and understanding (Coldwell & Willis, 2017; Collins et al., 2010) and a reliance on structured ways of writing which limited creativity (Gibbons, 2019). There was also a suggestion that an emphasis on providing 'correct answers' leaves little room for mystery, exploration, risk taking and the freedom to doubt in education and learning (Lumb, 2014).

Children were said to have lost their enjoyment of learning (Winter, 2017) due to "a very cold culture of learning" (Forrester, 2005, p.281) where the main concern is passing exams (Forrester, 2005; Gibbons, 2019; Taber et al, 2011; Winter, 2017). This was reported as having resulted in young people not able to take the subjects they enjoy (Winter, 2017) or explore areas that aren't on the curriculum that would otherwise have been more current and culturally relevant to their own lives (Dymoke, 2012). This is reflected by the following teacher quote: "it's just a shame their eyes don't light up" (Gibbons, 2019, p.42).

Accountability measures were also seen as posing a threat to pupils' wellbeing, with high-stakes testing causing immense pressure (Taber et al, 2011; Troman et al, 2007; Winter, 2017) which can lead to 'public humiliation' (Winter, 2017). A trainee teacher equated results with telling a pupil, "okay, that's what you're worth basically" (Taber et al, 2011, p.179). The Ofsted process was also described as 'draining' for pupils as well as staff (Chapman, 2002). The pressure on staff was also seen to have a knock-on effect on pupils as teachers become 'distracted' from the caring aspects of their work which deprives pupils of the emotional support they need (Forrester, 2005).

There were concerns that children with SEN and vulnerable children are disproportionately affected by the accountability measures that are supposed to protect them. SATs were viewed as a barrier to inclusion, with the prescriptive and rigid nature of the content making it difficult for children with SEN to access and achieve the levels required, having a knock-on effect on their confidence and self-esteem (Kendall, 2019). There was concern for children coming from a low socio-economic background with teachers believing that social class is a barrier for children accessing the national curriculum (Lefstein, 2013). The pressure for schools to achieve certain results was also reported to have led to unethical practices which disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, with certain children not being entered into exams:

> "We're all in this game whether we like it or not to get a number of A stars or As to Cs and that also relates not only to the department but to the individual [teacher] because we're on performance management related pay now. And the pressures you know. I've got colleagues now who say, 'shall we enter this one?' Well the criteria is has he produced any work that could get him a grade. Then we're told 'Yes, but he's not going to do well enough'" (Nicholl & McLellan, 2008, p592-593)

2.1.3.6. The benefits of accountability measures

The included literature indicated that teachers saw two main benefits of accountability measures. The use of data for tracking pupil's achievement and progress was seen to be useful for teachers to inform their teaching (Taber et al, 2011; Winter, 2017). They also were seen to provide a way to inform parents and other external stakeholders of how the school was doing and provide a sense of reassurance that staff were doing a good job (Coldwell & Willis, 2017; Taber et al, 2011). One head teacher also talked of a sense of 'pride' in their data and appreciated results as a way of demonstrating the hard work and achievements of their pupils (Coldwell & Willis, 2017).

There was some evidence that accountability measures can encourage good practice amongst teachers, although these normally had a caveat. The need to prepare for Ofsted drove teachers to 'get things in place' and ensure plans and schemes of work were kept updated (Forrester, 2005; Plowright, 2007). A senior manager reported that Ofsted confirmed and amplified the changes the school believed it needed to make, and that these were then made "quickly, much more quickly" (Chapman, 2002, p.266).

However, as discussed in the previous sections, the overall finding from this literature review was that teachers perceived that the benefits of accountability measures were overridden by the disadvantages. On the whole teachers considered accountability measures to not work in the interests of all pupils, themselves or the schools.

2.1.3.7. Summary

A review of the literature included in literature review 1 suggests that participating teachers perceived accountability measures to be ineffective in their current form. Whilst they wanted to be held to account, they found the current measures lacked validity, not offering a 'true' representation of school performance and pupil achievement. Accountability measures were also found to be of limited help in raising standards in schools, encouraging short-term over long-term fixes and increasing administrative duties.

Accountability measures were reported as leading teachers to engage in practices that they believed were not in the best interest of their pupils, but were necessary to satisfy external

stakeholders. This, as well as the general pressures of accountability, was viewed as having a detrimental effect on staff wellbeing, which lowered morale.

There was also a perceived detrimental effect on young people, with accountability measures being viewed as leading to a narrowing of the curriculum and teaching to the test, stifling pupils' love of learning. High-stakes testing was also seen as damaging to pupils' wellbeing. Teachers believed that vulnerable children were most likely to feel the negative effects of accountability measures.

Although teachers were largely critical of accountability measures, there was an acknowledgement that there were some benefits. Data was seen as useful for tracking pupils' progress and a way of celebrating achievements. Accountability measures also encouraged elements of good practice and led to more rapid implementation of changes.

2.2. Question 2: What does research say about teachers' perceptions of low-attaining pupils?

Low attainment is an inevitable consequence of a hierarchical model of achievement. Despite this, Literature Review 1 found that schools are determined to avoid low achievement, and endeavour to maximise assessment results and high standards.

The research reviewed in Literature Review 1 did not focus on low-attaining pupils specifically. To ensure the widest breadth of research was reviewed, a second search was undertaken to review teachers' perceptions of low-attaining pupils.

2.2.1. Search strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted on 14th August 2020 using the same four databases: PsychINFO, PsyArticles, Education Source and ERIC. Table 3 lists the search terms that were used.

Table 3

Search terms entered into databases for literature review 2

Search 1		Search 2		Search 3
Teacher	AND	attitude OR	AND	"low attain*" OR
		opinion OR		"low achiev*" OR
		perception OR		"low perform*" OR
		thought OR		"poor attain*" OR
		discourse		"poor achiev*" OR
				"poor perform*" OR
				"less able"

The search was narrowed to focus on the UK by adding a 'Geography: United Kingdom (England)' and 'Geography: United Kingdom' limiters, to provide results relevant to schools in the UK. This resulted in the identification of 46 papers, a full list of which can be found in Appendix E.

The titles and abstracts of these papers were reviewed with the application of the inclusion criteria listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Inclusion criteria for literature review 2

Inclusion	Rationale	No. excluded
Empirical research papers only	To ensure papers are research rather than commentary pieces	7
Research conducted in the UK	To ensure research is relevant to the UK context	2
Research on school age pupils	To ensure research is relevant to institutions affected by school accountability measures, rather than higher education	1
Paper's focus is on low-attaining pupils	To ensure papers are relevant to the literature review question	12
Paper's focus is on teacher's views	To ensure papers are relevant to the literature review question	16

Following the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, there was a total of 8 papers eligible for the literature review, a list of which can be found in Appendix F.

2.2.2. Overview of the literature

The aims of the research papers included in the literature review were broad, as the research focused on different elements of low-attaining pupils. Some papers concentrated on specific low-attaining groups such as children with English as an Additional Language (EAL; Walters, 2017) or children experiencing poverty (Thompson et al., 2016) whereas others looked at low attainment more broadly (Mazenod et al., 2018; Kelly et al., 2013).

When undertaking the search for this literature review, a conscious decision was made to keep the search terms broad and not input groups known to be typically included in the 'low attainment' category. The aim was to focus on general low attainment and avoid distorting results by focusing on specific groups.

The papers spanned a time period of 13 years between 2005 (Rustique-Forrester, 2005) and 2018 (Mazenod, 2018). There were no noticeable differences between the findings and themes amongst the papers spanning this time period.

Qualitative methodology was the chosen design for all of the papers, with two of the researchers choosing to supplement this with some quantitative data (Mazenod et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2016). The main data collection method was obtained either through interviews or focus groups, with some researchers also including ethnographic data such as classroom observations.

Similar to the first literature review, the CASP (2018) highlighted that some researchers did not state their method of data analysis (Smith, 2010; Walters, 2017; see Appendix G for full CASP breakdown). Furthermore, none of the researchers in the eight papers reviewed adequately considered the impact of their roles, potential bias and influence on the data (Bradbury, 2011; Kelly et al., 2013; Mazenod et al., 2018; Rustique-Forrester, 2005; Singal & Swann, 2009; Smith, 2010; Thompson et al., 2016; Walters, 2017). Although arguably less important than for the previous literature review, which had political nuances, an argument can be made that pupils' low attainment is a socio-political issue. There is also a question of social desirability bias, considering teachers' responsibilities in progressing pupil attainment.

In contrast with the first literature review, all of the studies provided recommendations in light of their findings, which rendered the research valuable and helpful.

The findings of the research papers fell into four themes, which will be discussed in turn.

1. Who are low-attaining pupils?

2. A 'deficit' model of low attainment

3. Low-attaining pupils as a 'threat'

4. Performativity

2.2.2.1. Who are low-attaining pupils?

The literature defined low-attaining pupils diversely, varying from vague ('weaker academically'; Rustique-Forrester, 2005) to explicit ('Bangladeshi children with EAL'; Walters, 2017). Poverty was considered by several researchers (Bradbury, 2011; Rustique-Forrester, 2005; Thompson et al., 2016). Other areas that were explored were SEN (Mazenod et al., 2018) and race (Bradbury, 2011; Walters, 2017).

Participants in the majority of studies frequently referred to behaviour when discussing low attainment (Kelly et al., 2013; Mazenod et al., 2018; Rustique-Forrester, 2005; Singal & Swann, 2009; Smith, 2010; Walters, 2017). This was particularly apparent in Rustique-Forrester's (2005) research where the initial research aim was around school exclusions, but the teachers, at times, referred to the low-attaining population interchangeably with the excluded population. The authors concluded that a rise in exclusion partly because accountability measures have "discouraged instructional practices that would benefit low-

achieving students" (Rustique-Forrester, 2005, p28). Low-attaining children were described as 'lazy' and with an 'attitude' (Walters, 2017); 'disruptive' (Rustique-Forrester, 2005); 'disengaged' (Mazenod et al., 2018); and not 'bothered' or 'committed' to learning (Smith, 2010). Generally, teachers seemed to suggest that these behaviours were contributing factors to their low attainment, rather than the result of.

In five of the eight studies, teachers described low-attaining pupils as lacking in confidence (Mazenod et al., 2018; Rustique-Forrester, 2005; Singal & Swann, 2009; Thompson et al., 2016; Walters, 2017), with most suggesting that this contributes to their low attainment. However, Rustique-Forrester's (2005) study found that teachers viewed low confidence as a result of the low attainment, rather than a cause: "[The national target] makes it hard for [pupils with special educational needs] to feel confident and positive about taking exams." (Rustique-Forrester, 2005, p.20).

2.2.2.2. A 'deficit' model of low attainment

Teachers suggested that pupil traits affected their low attainment (Mazenod et al., 2018, Thompson et al., 2016; Walters, 2017) which Thompson et al. (2016) described as a 'deficit model'. This was referred to in relation to 'pupil deficit' and 'parent deficit', terms which are borrowed in this review to discuss the wider literature findings. 'Pupil deficit' attributed low attainment to the pupils themselves, including a belief that they have low aspirations or are not working hard enough. 'Parent deficit' referred to the belief that pupils do less at school because of their parents/carers' low aspirations or negative attitudes towards education.

Thompson et al. (2016) described being "alarmed" that by the end of their PGCE course, 24% of the student teachers surveyed did not agree that there was a link between poverty and educational achievement. Of the 76% who agreed there was a link, the majority used deficit models to explain why this was the case. Using deficit models to account for poor attainment was not unique to this study.

The concept of 'pupil deficit' was often referred to in relation to behavioural attributes (as described previously in section 2.2.2.1.). Teachers were aware of other contributing factors, but seemed unable to consider these, as their main focus was on the child's attributes and behaviour. Thompson et al.'s (2016) study indicated that teachers ignored the effects of poverty: "everyone has an equal chance to work hard during school and out of school. The more you put in yourself, the more you get out" (p.223). Walters (2017) found that a teacher was unable to keep in mind that a pupil with EAL did not have enough language to access all lessons, instead accusing him of 'not listening' and being 'unmotivated'. There was also a view that low-attaining pupils lacked the 'resilience' needed to achieve (Mazenod et al., 2018).

Thompson et al. (2016) described parent deficit in relation to student teachers' beliefs that children in poverty did not achieve well in school due to their parents' or carers' low aspirations or negative attitudes to education. Bradbury (2011) found that teachers believed parents from a low socio-economic status who spoke little English did not 'work with' their children, 'engage with them' or 'develop their mind' and that the children didn't 'see a lot of books' at home. The literature review found that children's cultural background was also seen as having an impact on their attainment in school. A teacher suggested that a pupil

was underachieving due to 'defiance' and an 'attitude' towards her which she linked to a personality clash rooted in his male, Muslim background (Walters, 2017). Cultural differences were also used to explain children's health difficulties: "Their parents a lot of the time come from very hot countries and get very concerned about the cold, they don't like it when their children go out" (Bradbury, 2011, p665).

The suggestion that a child's low attainment is inherent or impacted by their home environment serves to absolve schools from accountability for pupils' attainment and future achievements. This was highlighted in the following quotes by two different teachers: "the solution lies with the pupils we take into this school … we need to be more selective if we want to reduce disruptive behaviour and exclusions"; "If you want to concentrate on raising achievement…pupils who you can't help, you have to let them go" (Rustique-Forrester, 2005, p.24).

2.2.2.3. Low-attaining pupils as a 'threat'

Walters (2017) argued that having a low-attaining child in the class can challenge a teacher's self-identity. By using a 'within-child' explanation of low attainment, the teacher can continue to judge themselves as competent. This example of teachers feeling unskilled in their role underpins a narrative of low-attaining pupils being seen as a 'threat'.

In contrast, Kelly et al.'s (2013) study noted how teachers in England (in comparison to teachers in Denmark) believed they were entirely responsible for their pupils' learning, with one explaining: "I expect all of my students to do well and if they haven't, then I haven't been doing my job" (p.562). This places a level of added responsibility on teachers who then

feel the need to invest more time and one-to-one support, which leads to capacity issues (Mazenod et al., 2018). This can drive schools to adopt practices that relieve this threat of pressure for the school and staff: "it does mean that [for] children who find school very difficult ... teachers have very little leeway with them. Therefore when [teachers] feel they can't get deal any longer [sic], then the answer is exclusion" (Rustique-Forrester, 2005, p.17). Low-attaining pupils were also seen as a threat to the future of the school, with staff concerned about how early years' assessments would impact future value-added scores, referring to the 'risk' of marking 'too high' for a 'difficult intake' (Bradbury, 2011).

2.2.2.4. Performativity

There was a suggestion that teachers' view of low-attaining pupils as a 'threat' resulted from accountability measures and associated 'performativity' (Bradbury, 2011; Rustique-Forrester, 2005). In general, teachers were less concerned with pupils' knowledge and understanding, and more concerned with observable 'good' behaviour, which indicates that they are working and thus 'performing'.

A key concern for teachers was pupils' ability to be 'on task' and complete work (Kelly et al., 2013; Mazenod et al., 2018; Singal & Swann, 2009; Walters, 2017). Walters (2017) suggested that this fixation was necessary to allow teachers to maintain and manage large classes whilst maintaining a sense of competency. Kelly et al. (2013) noted that teachers in Denmark were more concerned with facilitating understanding, in contrast to those in England who focused on exam performance. Singal and Swann (2009) compared teachers' task focus to children's perceptions of their experience of learning outside of school and suggested that these other learning experiences are focused on building confidence and

developing existing skills, whereas school experiences are about what they 'don't know' and 'can't do'.

Rustique-Forrester's (2005) study directly linked teachers' focus on outputs to the accountability measures that evaluate school and teacher competency. They aimed to investigate the impact of accountability measures on the rise in exclusions and found a link between exclusions and low-attaining pupils. Teachers suggested that pressures to improve league table ranking resulted in removing pupils to improve school results, as described by a Head of Year participating in their research:

> "No school wants to be associated with low performance. So the school tries as much as possible ... and the only way we can do that is to get rid of those who in one way or another ... are not allowing [improvement] to happen" (p.22).

This practice was discussed in relation to high-stakes exams, resultant league table positioning and inspections, with non-performing pupils described as 'liabilities'. Rustique-Forrester suggested that the pressures and incentives to exclude pupils who posed a threat within a performativity culture were felt by all participating schools. However, in low-excluding schools, they suggested that in-school structures gave staff a higher capacity to resist these pressures.

Rustique-Forrester's (2005) study suggests that teachers saw low educational attainment as a threat to schools' status in the accountability system. However, Bradbury (2011) highlighted that the accountability measures themselves could be creating inequality which leads to low attainment. The research described a school being pressured by the local authority into lowering the assessment results of their early years' intake as "We're in an

EAZ [Education Action Zone], underprivileged children – [*cynically*] there should be no chance of them getting nines" (Bradbury, 2011, p.664). The school had a vested interest to keep early years marks low to maximise the value-added scores when the pupils took their Year 6 SATs. Therefore, the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) scores were lowered for the 'low-ability' pupils. The authors argued that this further distanced the 'low-ability' from the 'high-ability', which starts a narrative that these children are 'behind expectations' and subsequently prevails. They suggested that this happened because pupils assessed as 'low' were seen as 'expendable' within the system, due to the effects of school accountability policies.

2.2.2.5. Summary

The literature reviewed found that the term 'low-attaining children' was used concurrently with descriptions of vulnerable groups, such as those experiencing poverty, SEN and EAL. In addition, teachers perceived low attainment to be synonymous with behavioural difficulties, which were typically viewed as a contributing factor.

The findings suggest that teachers often attributed low achievement in the context of a pupil deficit model, arising from their lack of confidence, resilience and drive or a parental deficit model, stemming from their low aspirations, bad parenting and lack of support. This was the case even when other contributing factors were known to the teachers e.g. poverty. This culture of 'blame' could be accounted for due to teachers viewing low-attaining pupils as a threat to their sense of self and competency. It can be argued that this is particularly the case in the current school accountability system, where pupil attainment is a measure of the overall school performance.

2.3. Concluding comments

The literature reviews highlight the problematic nature of accountability measures in regard to the fixation on performance and attainment, as measured by high-stakes testing and school inspections. There were suggestions that accountability measures actively encourage unethical practices by schools to safeguard their reputations and budgets and that this exacerbates the view that low-attaining pupils pose a threat to schools' and teachers' sense of competence.

The literature reviews highlighted a discourse of pressure arising from accountability measures. Teaching staff felt they had no choice but to engage in practices that they did not believe were best for their pupils, but were seen as a 'necessary evil' to allow them to meet performance measures. With regard to low-attaining pupils, there was a focus on 'behaviour', with teachers attributing low achievement to bad behaviour and lack of ambition or parental low aspirations and lack of support. Teachers were found to be fixated on the pupils' outward signs of 'performing' such as completing tasks, instead of the pupils gaining knowledge and understanding.

These reviews highlight a gap in the literature with regard to examining the impact of accountability measures on the discourses surrounding low-attaining pupils. One study bore some similarities and highlighted the need for more research in this area. Rustique-Forrester (2005) examined the impact of England's accountability reforms on exclusion and found a link between exclusions and low-performing pupils. They recommended further investigation into the impact of accountability measures on other aspects of the education

system, including at the teacher level. A question was posed with regard to teacher capacity to meet demands of accountability whilst preventing negative impacts on pupils.

The present research intends to explore this gap in the literature, by considering the links between school accountability measures and teacher discourses regarding low-attaining pupils.

2.4. The present research

2.4.1. The importance of discourses and politics

The research reviewed largely failed to acknowledge and reflect upon the researchers' own political viewpoints within their analysis. Indeed, it has been argued that much research within the educational psychology field attempts to exist within a political vacuum, leading to calls for practitioners to think more critically about the impact of society, power and politics (Williams et al., 2017). This research hopes to highlight the political nature of teaching and encourage EPs and teachers to think critically about teaching and its interrelationship with educational policy and social-political power.

By using CDA with a Marxist lens, the researcher's political standing will be considered, and be an instrumental part of the data analysis. Discourses within society help to either sustain or potentially transform the social status quo and unequal power relations (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997; see Section 1.5.1.). CDA can identify how discourses are transferred through hierarchical power structures and the way they are adopted or resisted by groups within the system (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). It is hoped that by

examining this, it will be possible to identify and illuminate if and how potentially

problematic discourses around low-attaining pupils are upheld or resisted by teachers. The

literature review highlighted that researchers seldom made recommendations based on

their findings, when the research had a policy/political focus. It is hoped that, although the

present research is exploratory, by looking at how discourses are sustained or challenged, it

can stimulate thinking regarding this contentious area.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the aims and purpose of the present research, before exploring the epistemological and ontological positioning. The chosen methodology is outlined with methodological decisions justified. The procedures of the study are then described, including recruitment, conducting the study, and analysis. The trustworthiness has been considered alongside the ethical considerations.

Reflexivity of the researcher is discussed as part of the analysis process. This research acknowledges that the researcher and their influence cannot be separated from the research, including decisions on design, recruitment, analysis and findings. As a result, it was considered appropriate that the following chapter be written in first person.

3.1. Research aims and questions

This research considered GCSE teachers' discourses around low-attaining pupils in relation to accountability measures as set out by education policy.

This research aimed to:

1. explore the discourses around accountability measures and low-attaining pupils

2. explore how the discourses uphold and/or challenge the structures in place that enable the system.

3.2. Purpose of research

Due to the lack of research in this area, the purpose of the research was exploratory.

Exploratory research often involves using qualitative techniques to collect unstructured

information to explore a new topic and give initial insights into the nature of an issue

(Strydom, 2013). Exploratory research requires flexibility in looking for data and requires

intimate first-hand understanding of the group/situation being observed (Given, 2008).

The present research aimed to interpret how the language used by teachers communicates

their values, beliefs and assumptions regarding low-attaining pupils, and how this relates to

the social and political context (i.e. accountability measures). It is not searching

systematically for a specific answer to test a hypothesis as an explanatory study may do

(Given, 2008), instead seeking understanding and insight.

3.3. Epistemological and ontological positioning

The epistemological position of this research is that research cannot exist separate to the

researcher. Every choice made by the researcher is entwined with the individual and driven

by their philosophical standing. This philosophical stance questions reality, and how we are

able to gain knowledge of that reality (Heaviside, 2017).

3.3.1. Ontology and epistemology

Ontology is the study of being, questioning the understanding of reality (Crotty, 1998; Guba

& Lincoln, 1994; Gray, 2009). It can be viewed as a continuum between two competing

ontologies: realism and relativism. Realism suggests there is one single reality, which is

objective and exists independently from an individual's own personal knowledge and perception. In contrast, relativism asserts that there are multiple realities; reality differs according to an individual's personal experiences and perception. Relativism proposes there is no one single reality which is objective, rather every individual has their own personal reality or reality is constructed socially with shared meaning being developed through interaction (Andrews, 2012; Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994 Heaviside, 2017).

Epistemology is the study of knowledge (how we know what we know), and the relationship between the 'knower' and the subject being researched (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2015). An example of two polarised epistemological positions would be objectivism and constructionism (to be referred to as 'social constructionism' from this point forward). Objectivism assumes that reality is objective and exists independent of an individual's conscious thoughts. The researcher does not influence the subject, or vice versa (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Social constructionism assumes that truth is not objective or discoverable, rather it is constructed as we engage in the world and with others. This suggests that people will make meaning of the same phenomenon in different ways (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, this experience is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically, so meaning must be understood in the context of these conditions. Meaning can be made, perceived and understood in many different ways, yet neither way is necessarily wrong (Willig, 2013). The realist ontology is therefore related to the objectivist epistemology, and the relativist ontology related to the constructionist epistemology.

3.3.2. The present research

The orientation of this research stems from a relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology. The research is designed to deliver one interpretation of the experiences of a group of teachers in one school, rather than attempt to find the 'truth'. The findings of this study represent an interpretation, which may differ to that of another researcher who may interpret it differently. Similarly, every reader's interpretation of the findings will, in all probability, be variable. This refers to the concept of hermeneutics, which is the study of understanding and interpretation. All humans engage in hermeneutical processes of interpretation to make meaning of experience. Therefore, for the reader to understand the interpretation of events as clearly as possible, it is important for the language used to be clearly explained, as well as the researchers' experiences and perceptions of the world (Given, 2008; Sandage et al., 2008). Using a Marxist lens aims to support this process by outlining the ideologies used in the interpretation and analysis process. This lens is explained further in section 3.4.3.

The focus of this research is on language, and the way teachers talk about their world and experiences, and therefore the way that knowledge is constructed within a social context. It is concerned with the process in which the language, and the meaning of that language, is constructed within a group. The teachers' inner experience is not an area of focus, rather it is assumed that the teachers will construct different versions of events depending upon the social context they are experiencing at the time. Therefore, the focus of interest is on the context of the focus group only – it is assumed that the way the teachers construct 'reality' would change as their social context changes.

3.4. Methodology

The methodology used was qualitative, which aimed to explore and understand the meaning individuals ascribe to a given situation and/or problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.4.1. Discourses

Language is a social practice which is determined by social structures, shaped by power relations in social institutions and in society as a whole. It also has effects on social structures, contributing to social continuity and social change (Fairclough, 2015). Discourses within society help to either sustain or potentially transform the social status quo and unequal power relations (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997) and thus can have a direct impact on the way low-attaining GCSE pupils are viewed and treated in schools governed by results-focused oversight. It was therefore deemed important for this research to explore the language used by teachers in an attempt to explore their perception of low-attaining pupils in relation to accountability measures. The historical and cultural context was considered in the analysis of these discourses, with the researchers' perspective explained as transparently as possible.

3.4.2. Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

CDA was chosen as it functions on the understanding that discourses are a relatively stable use of language that organise and structure social life (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). It takes the perspective that social life is built through power hierarchies in a socio-economic system "built upon the domination, exploitation and dehumanisation of people by people" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 304). CDA researchers are interested in the way discourse produces

and reproduces social domination by one group over others, and how dominated groups may discursively resist such abuse (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

CDA suggests that the discourses that take place between individuals are related to the the situations, institutions and social structures which frame them (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997). In this study, the conversations that occurred between teachers regarding low-attaining pupils and accountability measures were considered in relation to the present time and situation, the specific environment of the school, and the current political system.

3.4.3. CDA with a Marxist lens

A theoretical lens provides a framework from which knowledge is constructed for a research study. It provides a grounding base, or an anchor, for all elements, including the methods and analysis (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). There are many different lenses to look at phenomena and focus attention on different aspects of data. By using a theoretical lens, it is possible to move beyond individual insights to understand situations and their significance more widely (Reeves et al., 2008).

Applying a Marxist lens to analysis seeks to focus specifically on ideology with regard to materialism and consumerism. Marxism posits that capitalist societies like Britain, in which the market is sustained through production for private profit, are dominated by a ruling-class. The ruling 'capitalist' class owns the means of production and the 'working' class sells its labour to capitalists (Marx & Engels, 1888; Marx, 1976). This results in the capitalist class controlling the state, rather than the state being neutrally 'above' all classes.

The consequence is that social institutions that are seen to operate detached from the capitalist rule, continue to be dominated by the capitalist class (Fairclough, 2015). The division of labour leads to a division of interests. The ruling-class is obliged to present its interests as the collective interest for society as a whole. This results in the ruling-class' ideologies acquiring privileged status and being perceived as normal and desirable. The net result is that the ideologies of all other groups and classes are disempowered (Fairclough, 2015; Fairclough, 2010; Herzog, 2018; Sellnow, 2018).

A Marxist perspective acknowledges that there are relationships and struggles between the different classes, cultures, ethnicities, genders, ages, societal positions etc. The analysis of these power and class relations are significant in how discourses create conditions that allow power to be established, maintained and altered. Discourses reinforce or question 'taken for granted' beliefs regarding materialism, consumerism and empowerment (Fairclough, 2015; Fairclough, 2010; Herzog, 2018; Sellnow, 2018).

I considered a Marxist lens appropriate for the context of this research as schools and teachers are currently heavily constrained by extensive accountability measures set by the 'dominant class'. Accountability measures have been introduced with an espoused intention to raise school standards and to reduce the number of low-attaining pupils, which invariably categorises them as being at the bottom of the class hierarchy.

3.5. Research design

This study involved a focus group which consisted of seven participants who were all Year 11 teachers working in the same secondary school.

One important assumption that characterises CDA is the view that all discourses can only be understood with reference to their context. Hence, the notion of context is crucial for CDA, including sociopsychological, political, historical and ideological factors (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Its primary focus is not on individuals but on social relations (Fairclough, 2010). Discourse analysis does not require a large amount of text to produce meaningful analysis, instead it is reliant on naturally occurring speech amongst a pre-existing group (Willig, 2013). Therefore, the research method deemed most appropriate was to have a small focus group discussion with participants from one institution.

A focus group is a group of people, with certain characteristics, who are brought together by a trained facilitator to explore a given issue or topic through discussion (Anderson, 1998; Denscombe, 2010; Krueger & Casey, 2009). Focus groups have an interpersonal and interactive nature (Anderson, 1998; Guest et al., 2017). The data is collected within a social context (Patton, 2002), which allows for the analysis of social relations required for CDA. Focus groups also generate a wider range of views and ideas than is possible through individual interviews (Anderson, 1998; Kidd & Parshall, 2000), and produces the language needed to identify the dominant discourses present within the group. Individual interviews, on the other hand, offer more insight into individual respondents' thoughts, feelings and world view (Dilshad & Latif, 2013), which was not the emphasis of this study.

Focus groups aim to simulate a more natural social environment in which participants are influencing and being influenced by others, that cannot be achieved in an individual interview (Krueger & Casey, 2009). This should allow the natural discourses that normally arise between the group to surface. It should also stop the discourses being driven by the researcher, which is a possibility with individual interviews and questioning (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

There are some characteristics of focus groups that can be considered as limitations, including the possibility of dominant voices in a group stifling quieter individuals, the discussion losing focus and moving away from the research topic, conflicts arising or individuals feeling unable to provide honest opinion. It is sometimes recommended that researchers undergo training to become a competent facilitator who can skilfully mediate the group. It has been suggested by some that researchers should work with the focus group to set ground rules, ensure that all members have a chance to contribute, without feeling pressured to do so if unwilling, and be able to redirect group discussions where appropriate (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Sherriff et al., 2014). Upon consideration, it was decided that these measures were not necessary to implement for the present research. CDA relies on the use of 'naturally occurring' language which should not be influenced by the researcher (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). The dominant voices, conflicts and digressions are all seen as relevant to the research process and not to be interfered with. Consequently, the identified limitations of the focus groups, and the researcher's inexperience as a mediator are not considered a weakness, and in this instance a focus group was deemed an appropriate data collection method for this research study. Rather than trying to influence the interaction of the group, it was instead considered essential to allow the group

dynamics to play out and to instead give careful consideration to the ethical factors involved, as discussed in section 3.12.

3.6. Participant recruitment

The optimum number for a focus group is 6-12 individuals, to capitalize on group dynamics and stimulate discussion without being unmanageable (Guest et al., 2017). Focus groups require participants to share some common characteristics so that interaction can ensue at an optimum level and prevent situations where people can dominate or withdraw (Anderson, 1998; Dilshad & Latif, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2009).

The focus group consisted of seven Year 11 teachers who all taught in the same secondary school. This provided the homogeneity required for a successful focus group. Focusing on one school allowed the context to be understood and considered within the analysis.

Some researchers argue that focus groups ideally consist of individuals who do not know each other, so that pre-existing relationships do not influence disclosure (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). This was not appropriate for this study as the orientation (social constructionist) and methodology (CDA) required the context to be understood and considered, and for the conversation to develop as naturally as possible (Willig, 2013).

When selecting participants, the inclusion criteria in Table 5 was applied.

Table 5

Participant inclusion criteria

	Inclusion	Justification
Type of school	Teachers all work in the same state maintained school (state, academy or free school).	This is because independent schools are not subject to the same accountability measures as state maintained schools.
Length of service in the school	Teachers have taught Year 11 for at least one year in their current school	To ensure participants have significant experience within that school context
Amount of Year 11 lessons taught	At least 20% of the teacher's timetables are made up of Year 11 lessons	To ensure participants have mutual experience of teaching Year 11 pupils
Teacher responsibility	Teachers must be on the main pay scale and not hold leadership responsibilities as part of the senior leadership team	To ensure the participants have a similar status and position in the power hierarchy

3.6.1. The impact of COVID-19

Recruitment proved challenging amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The original plan had been to run a focus group at the end of the Summer Term of 2020, following the end of the GCSE exams. During this period teachers usually have 'gained time' once Year 11 lessons conclude, and the pressures from the run up to the exams have eased. However, due to school closures and lockdown measures, it was not possible to run a focus group, so recruitment was placed on hold until the beginning of the Autumn term. It was deemed

important to pursue a face-to-face focus group as it allows participants to speak more freely and naturally, which is harder to accomplish virtually.

It was difficult to establish contact with schools at the beginning of the new school year as, understandably, schools were busy implementing new procedures relating to COVID-19 and settling back into the school routine. Therefore, I capitalised on contacts with schools I had previously worked with to maximise the chances of recruiting participants. I had hoped to visit the schools and talk to staff directly about the research, but again, due to COVID-19 safety procedures, this was not possible. I therefore had to entrust this process to a contact-staff member within the schools.

3.6.2. Study recruitment

To optimise the recruitment process, I shared my research proposal at a service team meeting at the beginning of the Summer term of 2020 and asked the EPs if they would contact the SENCOs of their link secondary schools to inquire if they would be interested in taking part. I composed an email for the EPs to send on my behalf, providing a description of the research alongside the information sheets and consent forms (see Appendix H & I).

Only two schools responded. I had worked extensively as a trainee EP in one of the schools (St. Benedict Academy; pseudonym) and had undertaken job shadowing in the other (Oak Wood Secondary School; pseudonym).

The St. Benedict Academy's SENCO sought authorisation from the head teacher who gave permission for the study to go ahead, but stated that it had to be carried out after school

hours in the teachers' own time. The SENCO emailed all the Year 11 teachers but none of the teachers contacted me to express their interest to take part. I therefore considered it appropriate to exclude St. Benedict's Academy as being a viable recruitment option.

The SENCO of Oak Wood, sought permission from the head teacher who was happy for it to take place during school hours. The SENCO informally asked some teachers if they were willing to take part and there was a lot of interest but suggested waiting until the beginning of the new school year to formally recruit participants.

Due to the COVID restrictions, I was unable to physically visit Oak Wood to speak to staff about the research and obtain consent. I therefore liaised with the SENCO and entrusted this process to her. A date and time for the focus group was scheduled and I received a list of participants the week before, with assurances that all participants met the inclusion criteria and had received copies of the information sheet and consent form (see Appendix H & I).

3.6.2.1. Oak Wood Secondary School

Oak Wood is a secondary school and sixth form college in a large city. The school prides itself as being one of the highest performing schools in the country (as described on their website) and is ranked highly on the school performance league table. Their most recent Ofsted report described them as Outstanding in all categories.

The Ofsted report stated:

- The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is in line with the national average.

- The proportion of pupils in receipt of support for SEN is below the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average.

- The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is above the national average.

Seven teachers from Oak Wood were recruited to take part. When doing discourse analysis, demographic information about participants should only be reported where relevant. This is because providing this information out of context and without rationale constructs identities, and suggests particular social categories. Discourse analysis is concerned with the exploration of ways in which social reality is constructed within particular contexts through language, and an imposition of social categories at the outset is not considered to be helpful (Willig, 2013). Consideration was given to whether listing the subjects the teachers taught would be 'relevant' in this context, but this was decided against as there are social perceptions of hierarchies with regard to subjects, especially at GCSE level.

Participant numbers rather than pseudonyms were used to ensure assumptions about the participants' demographic data are reduced. The participant numbers were assigned according to where they were seated around the table, with Participant 1 sitting closest to me and the numbers being assigned systematically in a clockwise direction. The only other information deemed relevant to note is that one of the participants was the SENCO of the school and was largely responsible for the recruitment of the other participants.

Consideration was given to her involvement as her SENCO role meant that she had

leadership responsibilities. However, upon discussion with my supervisor, I decided to allow

her participation as she had committed to leading the recruitment efforts in the school and

carried them out on the undisclosed assumption that she would participate. At the point

that she declared this, she had invested considerable time and effort in the project and it

seemed unethical not to include her when the potential negative impact on the project of

doing so was minimal. She was not part of the senior leadership team and did not have any

direct line management responsibility over the other group members.

3.7. Procedures

3.7.1. The setting

The focus group took place at Oak Wood at 3pm which was during school hours, but after

lessons had finished. It was held in the school's largest classroom to allow for social

distancing in compliance with the school's COVID-19 policy. The classroom was located next

to a pupil work area, so there was background noise throughout the duration of the focus

group.

Each of the participants' desks had an information sheet, consent form, and a prompt sheet

placed face down alongside a paper plate with snacks.

3.7.2. Procedures

Once the participants were seated, I asked them to read through the information sheet

(Appendix H) and sign their consent forms (Appendix I), which I had sent beforehand by

email for them to review in advance. I read out the introduction (see Appendix J) and started to record using two phones placed face down on a desk in the middle of the circle. I asked the participants to introduce themselves for the purposes of the recording. I then asked them to turn over their prompt sheet (see Figure 2) as I read out the stimulus for the focus group discussion.

Current education policy measures school success through a variety of accountability measures. Schools are held accountable by league tables and Ofsted inspections. Teachers are individually held accountable through performance-related pay. All of these accountability measures largely revolve around the academic attainment of students as measured by high-stakes testing. Therefore, low-attaining students can be seen as evidence of schools' and teachers' shortcomings.

I would like you to discuss your thoughts and experiences of these accountability measures with regard to the low-attaining students in your classes.

Figure 2
Prompt sheet given to participants during the focus group
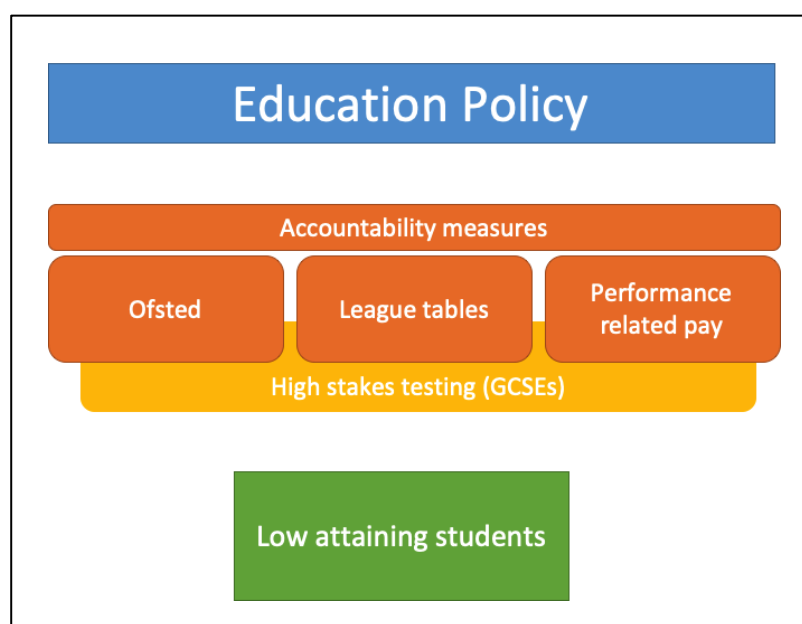
I sat away from the circle and allowed the group to talk without interruption. I intervened only once, when the group went quiet and a member suggested they may be finished. I asked the group: *"Any last thoughts about how this affects you in the classroom? Or personally?"* (line 572 of transcript; Appendix K).

Upon conclusion of the discussion, I thanked the group for their contribution and time, and encouraged them to contact me should they wish to talk to me about any aspect of the research and/or their participation.

3.7.3. Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to practice facilitation skills and identify any procedural issues that might highlight necessary adjustments. The pilot aimed to field test the procedures to ensure the focus group design was sound. Some researchers run data analysis on their pilot data (Given, 2008), but this was not deemed appropriate for the purposes of this research, especially considering the research positioning and analysis method.

The pilot focus group was conducted in a 6th form college in a large city: Darwin Academy (pseudonym). Although 6th form colleges do not teach GCSE, they are subjected to the same accountability measures underpinned by A level results. It was therefore deemed appropriate to carry out the pilot in a 6th form college to test the procedural part of the study only.

I had taught at Darwin Academy during my teaching career, and used my contact with a former colleague to obtain permission from the Senior Leadership Team for me to conduct

the pilot focus group. I emailed an amended information sheet and consent form which explained that their data would not be included in my research study. Six teachers volunteered to take part, five of whom were former colleagues of mine.

The Darwin Academy pilot focus group took place the week before the focus group at Oak Wood. The pilot study was a useful undertaking and highlighted several issues that needed to be considered for the main study, and have been outlined in Table 6.

Table 6
Reflections from pilot group and amendments made

Issue experienced in pilot focus group	Description	Amendments made for main focus group
Communication with participants before the focus group	Communication with the participants was difficult. None of the participants replied to my email requesting they returned the completed consent form. When I sent a follow up email I received a reply from one of the participants saying that they had a marking deadline and were therefore not prioritising my emails. I had held off sending a follow-up email out of fear of being 'pushy', so was encouraged by the participant to not worry about chasing.	When communicating with the SENCO at Oak Wood via email, I was unafraid to chase when I didn't hear back after a few days. I sent the consent forms via email but also printed copies so that participants could complete them on the day of the focus group if they had not had a chance to complete it earlier.
Snacks	I provided snacks for the group (biscuits and fruit) and found that participants kept placing the packets in the middle of the table	I dispersed the snacks onto individual plates so that they were within easy reach and away from the microphone.

	next to the microphone, which created a crackly noise that was picked up on the recording every time they reached for more.	
Conversation directed towards me	At the beginning of the group, the participants directed all of their contributions towards me, rather than to each other. I also noticed that participants looked at me for reactions after some of their contributions.	I decided to sit outside of the group in the main study. I also changed my introduction to encourage them to treat me as an observer.
Nodding	I noticed that I nodded a lot during the discussion, especially if someone said something that I agreed with or that I thought was pertinent to my research. I noticed that participants began looking at me after some of their contributions to check my reaction.	I made a conscious effort to keep my head still and not show any reaction, even when group members looked at me.
Focusing on one topic	The group began talking about performance-related pay and continued with this topic for over 20mins until I prompted them to talk about Ofsted and league tables. After the focus group ended, participants told me that they had forgotten what they were meant to be talking about.	I created a prompt sheet that graphically represented the topics I wanted them to talk about (see Figure 2). Each participant had their own sheet to refer to.

3.8. Transcription

A UK based transcription service was used to transcribe the main body of the focus group

discussion. The service chosen provided assurance that the data would be protected in

accordance with the European Data Protection Act and that the audio file was encrypted both when sending and stored. The audio file was secure and could not be downloaded or stored by the transcriber outside of the internal company system. The contract stated that the audio file and transcript would be automatically deleted three months after I had received it. An email confirmation was sent to me when this happened. The audio file contained the first names of the participants, but no other identifiable information.

Once I received the transcript, I used the audio recording to check the accuracy of the transcript, amend any errors and fully anonymise the text. It was important to make the transcript 'my own', as Fairclough (2015) highlights researcher interpretation begins at this stage and influences the transcription process. Although the recordings were transcribed externally, I added additional details including punctuation, emphasis, tone and notes on laughter (the full transcript can be found in Appendix K). This process allowed me to become immersed in the data. Once the transcript was completed and checked, the audio recording was deleted.

3.9. Data Analysis

Fairclough (2015) described discourse as a 'social practice' which is a part of society, rather than external to it. It is a social process that is socially conditioned and has social effects. As a result, looking exclusively at the text itself is only a part of discourse analysis. To gain a richer picture, it is necessary to explore the interplay between the language, the social situation in which it was produced, and the wider society. As a result, Fairclough's three-dimensional framework was employed.

3.9.1. Three-dimensional framework (Fairclough, 2015)

Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional framework proposes that language and discourse have three dimensions, as represented in Figure 3. Analysis should occur at these three levels:

1. Micro-level: Description

   This is concerned with the formal properties of the text, such as vocabulary, grammar and textual structures. The analysis aims to form a description of the text.

2. Meso-level: Interpretation

   This level seeks to explore the relationship between the text and the interaction. The text is a product of a process of production. Analysis aims to seek meanings from the description of the text.

3. Macro-level: Explanation

   This level involves the relationship between interaction and social context. It aims to illuminate the implications for social practice.

The three dimensions do not exist discretely from each other, instead being interdependent, and therefore analysis does not necessarily occur sequentially, but simultaneously (Janks, 1997).

Figure 3

Diagram of Fairclough's three-dimensional framework

Description

Interpretation

Explanation
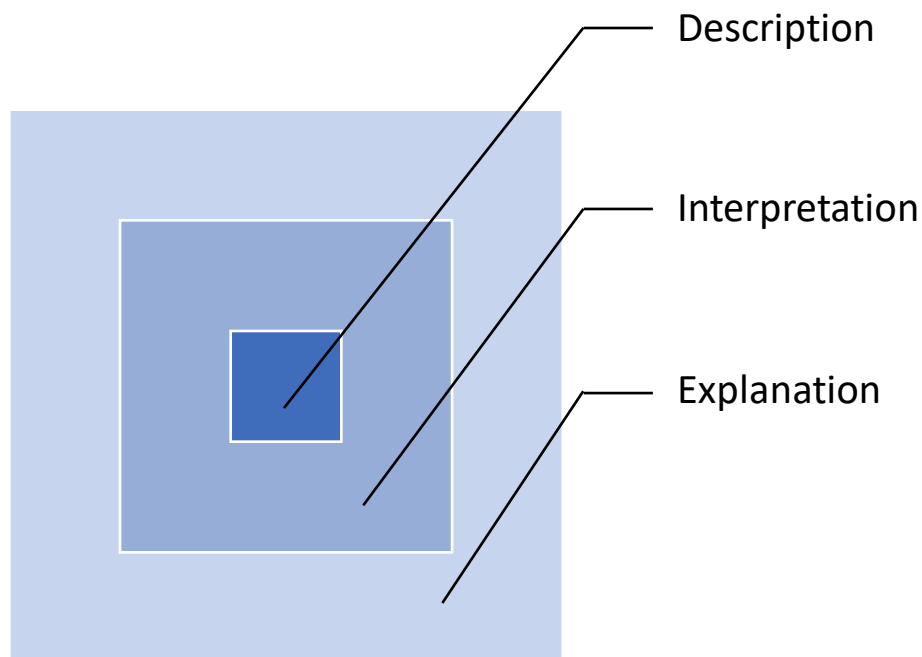
3.9.1.1. Description

The first stage of the analysis was the Description stage. I first read the transcript several times to ensure I was fully familiarised with the text and then used Fairclough's (2015) ten questions as a basis for analysing the text:

1. What *experiential* values do words have?

2. What *relational* values do words have?

3. What *expressive* values do words have?

4. What metaphors are used?

5. What *experiential* values do grammatical features have?

6. What *relational* values do grammatical features have?

7. What *expressive* values do grammatical features have?

8. How are (simple) sentences linked together?

9. What interactional conventions are used?

10. What larger-scale structures does the text have?

In this context, 'experiential' referred to the way the speaker represents their experience of the world – it referred to content, knowledge and beliefs. 'Relational' referred to the way social relationships are enacted via the discourse. 'Expressive' referred to the speakers themselves and social identities.

See Appendix L for an extract of the transcript with the 'description' analysis applied.

3.9.1.2. Interpretation

When analysing at an 'interpretation' level, I was concerned with a combination of what was 'in' the text, and what was 'in' me, as the interpreter. The formal features of the text acted as cues which activated elements of my assumptions and expectations of the world, what Fairclough called 'members' resources'. Due to this, I was sensitive to which resources I relied on to undertake the analysis and ensured that I was conscious of how my assumptions could influence the analysis. I reflect on this process further in section 3.10.

Interpretation occurred at the text level and the context level, a description of which can be found in Table 7.

Table 7

Interpretation at a text and context level.

Interpretation of text	
Surface of utterance	The interpretation of the words themselves using knowledge of language
Meaning of utterance	Assigning meaning to the constituent parts of a text according to my 'members' resources'
Local coherence	Making connections between utterances to produce a coherent interpretation of sequences of text
Text structure and 'point'	Interpreting 'global coherence' by considering how the whole text fits together. This was a summary interpretation of the text as a whole.
Interpretation of context	
Contents	The consideration of 'what is going on' in relation to the activity, topic and purpose.
Subjects	'Who is involved' and the social positions that are set up in relation to the specific situation.
Relations	Looking at social positions more dynamically in terms of how power, social distance etc were set up in the situation.
Connections	The consideration of the 'role' of language and how it was being used in the situation.

See Appendix M for an extract of the transcript with the 'interpretation' analysis applied.

3.9.1.3. Explanation

Analysis at the 'explanation' level aimed to portray the discourses as part of a social process, showing how it is determined by social structures and what reproductive effects the

discourses have on sustaining or changing those structures. To do this, it was necessary to explore the discourses using a specific theoretical lens. In the context of this study, the analysis was done through a Marxist lens, as was described in section 3.4.3.

Through the 'explanation' analysis, I considered the social determinants and the effects of the discourse, asking myself the following questions (Fairclough, 2015):

1. What power relations at situational, institutional and societal levels helped shape this discourse?

2. How is this discourse positioned in relation to struggles at the situational, institutional and societal levels?

3. Are these struggles overt or covert?

4. Does it contribute to sustaining existing power relations, or transforming them?

As part of the application of a Marxist lens, it was crucial to expose how material and economic practices shaped the dominant ideology about who 'should' and 'should not be' empowered. To do this I also considered the following (Sellnow, 2018):

1. What are the model and antimodel subject positions with regard to materialism, consumerism and empowerment?

2. What economic metaphors are offered and what are the values attached to them?

3. What are the potential implications this can have on individuals and society?

Due to the explanatory nature of this level of analysis, the findings of this process are detailed in the 'discussion' chapter of this thesis (section 5.1.).

3.9.2. Generating the dominant discourses

After undergoing the description and interpretation phase, I reviewed my analysis multiple times. Once fully familiarised, patterns and themes emerged from the data. I organised these discursive themes by placing them under subheadings of my three research questions (see Appendix N). From these notes, I refined these themes into dominant discourses.

Following the advice of Wiggins (2017), I began writing my analysis before the dominant discourses had been 'polished', as the writing process helped to refine my analysis. I organised the relevant quotes under subheadings of the discourses, and began in-depth analysis of each, using my initial analytical notes. This process resulted in the wording of the dominant discourses undergoing several variations before I settled on the final 'title' of the discourse. I also asked my supervisor and a colleague to act as 'disinterested peers' to check my analysis and aid the refinement of these discourses, as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). See Appendix O for an example of the refinement process of one of the dominant discourses.

3.10. Reflexivity

Fairclough (2015) highlighted that every part of the analysis process, from transcription through to explanation, is dependent on the analyst's 'interpretation'. What I 'saw' in the text, and what I deemed as worth reporting and emphasising, was influenced by how I, as

an individual, engaged with the text. It was therefore important to remain reflexive throughout the analysis process.

Reflexivity can be described as a researcher's continuous examination and explanation of how they have influenced a research project (Given, 2008). The researcher makes an effort to understand themselves as part of their process, their assumptions and limits; and engage in continuous self-critique and self-appraisal with regard to how their own experiences have influenced the research process (Dowling, 2006; Fuhrman & Oehler, 1986). This is important for discourse analysis; if the researcher does not consider and challenge their own assumptions, it is possible that they may fail to recognise the influence they had on the dominant discourses arising (Burr, 1995).

As part of my reflexive process, I followed the stages that Mauthner and Doucet (2003) suggested:

- social location and emotional responses
- academic and personal biographies
- institutional and interpersonal contexts
- ontological and epistemological conceptions

3.10.1. Social location and emotional responses

As recommended by Mauthner and Doucet (2002), before starting the analysis, I read the focus group transcript several times as part of a reflexive reading. I placed myself, my background, history and experiences in relation to what was discussed in the focus group

and considered how I responded emotionally and intellectually (see Appendix P for an extract of the transcript with my reflexive notes).

This process allowed me to examine how and where my assumptions and views may have affected my interpretation of the participants' words and how I later wrote about them. This was considered especially important considering my background in teaching and being subject to accountability measures. I considered the emotional, cognitive and behavioural impact that experiences had on me then, as well as being part of the motivation to undertake this research now.

3.10.2. Academic and personal biographies

Mauthner and Doucet (2003) emphasised the importance of considering how the researcher's academic and personal biographies may impact the research process.

As a student of the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, my academic training has had a strong psychodynamic influence. I noticed during the analysis process that I was drawn to think about what may have been lying beneath the surface of participants' words and what defences may have been at play. This was compounded by some assumptions that I had a deeper understanding of what they *really* meant due to my previous experiences as a teacher. By reflecting on these influences, I was able to consciously notice when I was doing this and used my analysis structure to focus back on the language and discourses present.

3.10.3. Institutional and interpersonal contexts

The interpersonal, political and institutional contexts in which researchers are embedded play a role in shaping research decisions. This became especially important to reflect on, considering the political underpinning of this research.

I underwent teacher training during Michael Gove's term as Education Secretary when he introduced GCSE and A level reforms in an attempt to make them more 'rigorous' (DfE, 2014). I was immersed in (and agreed with) narratives condemning the Conservative Party's stance on education. I have since continued to work in educational institutions which I have experienced as being largely politically left-leaning. Ironically, the week I conducted my focus group with the intention of conducting a Marxist analysis, the DfE published guidance ordering schools to not use resources produced by organisations that communicate a desire to abolish capitalism (DfE, 2020).

I have stayed mindful of my own political beliefs and experiences throughout the analysis process. By expressly stating and focusing on the Marxist lens, I have attempted to minimise my own personal feelings on the matter. I also ensured a continuous dialogue with my research supervisor, whose political opinions align with my own, so that we could consider together how the interpersonal factors between us and shared beliefs could influence the process.

In relation to analysing the transcript, I was aware that I had the assumption that the teachers participating would share my political viewpoints. Indeed, at several points the sitting government was mentioned in a negative way. Janks (1997) observed that looking at

a text critically is easy when we disagree with it. Therefore, as I did agree with a lot of what was discussed, it was necessary to move deliberately to resist the text's apparent naturalness. I ensured that I read it several times with the conscious aim of reading 'against' the text to counterbalance reading 'with' the text. I considered alternative, opposing viewpoints to that being discussed and reflected on how that may influence my interpretation of the data.

3.10.4. Ontological and epistemological conceptions

Mauthner and Doucet (2003) highlighted the importance of examining the ontological and epistemological assumptions built into the methods of data analysis by those who developed and used them. They warn of an uncritical adoption of the ontological and epistemological position which can lead to findings being portrayed as infallible.

They recommend being explicit about the ontological and epistemological assumptions informing the research, which I have stated in section 3.3. They also recommend adopting a critical approach to the findings and conclusions made, taking into account the conditions and constraints of the research design and how the positioning has affected it, which I have noted in the discussion in section 5.4.

3.11. Trustworthiness

A relativist stance does not cohere with the ideas of 'validity' and 'reliability'. Rather, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that naturalistic research can meet the criteria of 'trustworthy'

research through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, which has

been explored in Table 8.

Table 8

Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of this study

---

Credibility

Prolonged engagement	Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the researcher must invest sufficient time to learn the "culture", build trust and test for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents.	• I recruited a school in my placement local authority, to have a good understanding of the local context. • I used information from the school website to understand the school structures. • Before the start of the focus group, I arranged a 'warming up period' with refreshments to put people at ease and build trust with the group. • I ensured I was reflexive throughout, considering my academic and personal biographies, and my emotional responses to the research, as stated in section 3.10
Persistent Observation	The researcher must identify characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the research question and focus on them in detail. The researcher must be able to describe in detail how this process was carried out.	• I began the focus group with a statement indicating the relevant topic areas to be discussed, and provided a prompt sheet that was visible throughout the session. • I conducted a pilot study to assess my group facilitation skills and made changes to the way I conducted the study. • The recordings from the focus groups were transcribed for detailed analysis. • The analysis process has been described in detail in section 3.9. My

		findings contain a clear justification of areas considered relevant and/or irrelevant.
Peer debriefing	The researcher should present their analysis to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session. This is for the purpose of exploring aspects of the research that might not be immediately understood by others.	• I used supervision to critically analyse my work and check understanding of my analysis. • I paired up with a colleague who was using discourse analysis for their research to act as a 'disinterested peer'.
Negative case analysis	The researcher must continuously refine their hypothesis until it accounts for the majority of the participants involved.	• I purposely searched for evidence where the focus group data did not fit my initial conclusions and amended them accordingly.
Member checks	Data, interpretations and conclusions should be tested with members of those stake-holding groups from whom the data were originally collected. The researcher's interpretations should be recognisable to audience members as adequate representations of their realities. If an individual does not agree with the interpretation, they should still be able to follow how the researcher arrived at it.	• Member checks were not deemed appropriate due to the Marxist analysis. Instead, focus was placed on ensuring the interpretations could be reasonably followed by all audiences. • The analysis of the focus groups was detailed, with the process explicitly stated. • I have emphasised throughout my written report that this is one interpretation of the teachers' reality, rather than presenting it as truth.

Transferability

Transferability	Clean generalisations are not possible when taking a relativist and social	• I have clearly described the context in which the research was conducted in section 3.6.2.1,

constructionist orientation. At best, only working hypotheses can be proposed. Instead, researchers should focus on 'transferability', which depends on the degree of similarity between sending and receiving contexts. Transferability is not for the original researcher to propose, but is for others to suggest.

including anonymised details of the school, location and political context. This should enable individuals who are interested in making a transfer reach a conclusion about whether transfer is possible.

Dependability and confirmability

Dependability and confirmability	The researcher should implement an 'Inquiry Auditor' who will scrutinise the process of the research to determine its acceptability, and thus attest to the dependability of the research. The auditor should also examine the data, findings, interpretations and recommendations to establish confirmability.	- I engaged my research supervisor as an 'Inquiry Auditor', following the procedure of Halpern (1983, as cited in Lincoln and Guba, 1985). - Due to the ideological alignment between my research supervisor and I, and the political nature of the research and analysis process, I enlisted my placement supervisor as a second 'Inquiry Auditor'. They scrutinised my methods and interpretations throughout and purposefully questioned my bias. This helped me to clearly present my findings and rationally justify my interpretations. - This research will also be scrutinised through the formal Viva examination process before being made publicly available.

3.12. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the Tavistock and Portman Trust Ethics Committee (see Appendix Q for ethics application and Appendix R for approval). No significant risks were anticipated, but the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) was fully accounted for, with consideration of consent, confidentiality, right to withdraw and protection.

3.12.1. Consent

A participant information sheet (see Appendix H) was provided to participants via email before their consent was gained and this information was reiterated at the start of the focus group. This information included full details of the research, appropriate expectations of what could occur during the discussions, information on confidentiality and their right to withdraw. Written consent (see Appendix I) was then obtained on the day, before the focus group commenced.

3.12.2. Confidentiality

When using focus groups, even if the researcher encourages confidentiality, they cannot be sure that the group members will respect it (Sherriff et al., 2014). This is particularly pertinent considering the participants in the focus group were known to each other, and therefore anonymity was not provided between members of the group. To encourage confidentiality, I reiterated the importance of respecting confidentiality of the discussions at the beginning of the focus group. I also ensured that the inability to guarantee confidentiality was explicit on the participant information sheets and explained the limits of confidentiality (such as safeguarding concerns).

3.12.3. Right to withdraw

I informed the participants that they had a right to withdraw from the focus group; but that after the completion of the focus group, they could not withdraw their data (also stated in the information sheet). This was because the whole transcript was required for analysis. If data were removed, the transcript could not be analysed as a 'whole' as it would be fragmented. It would also affect the meaning of the other participants' contributions (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). I explained to participants that they had a right to withdraw from the focus group; but that after the completion of the focus group, they could not withdraw their data. Instead, I informed them that they could request that their data is not quoted when the study is reported. This was stated in the information sheet as well as reiterated before the focus group began. If withdrawal of data had been requested during the focus group discussion, I would have terminated the focus group and deleted the recording.

3.12.4. Protection

The topics of discussion may have been sensitive to some, posing a potential risk of psychological distress. Teachers often enter the profession with the intention to make a difference and to support vulnerable children and young people. The findings and/or the critical stance of the study could be challenging and conflict with the values, beliefs and political opinions of the participants involved. To mitigate these issues, I provided an information sheet detailing my stance to ensure the participants were able to give informed consent. I informed and reminded participants of their right to withdraw from the process and offered follow up support from myself and by signposting them to other avenues of

support should they need it (for example, their GP, occupational health or other services applicable to their need).

Focus groups can promote self-disclosure, including inappropriate disclosure, when individuals psychologically identify with other in-group members (Sherriff et al., 2014). I explained to the group that some subjects might be unsuitable for the discussion, e.g. named pupils or staff members. During the focus group, I remained alert to participants revealing any distress, over-disclosure or possible breaches of confidentiality, ready to redirect the discussion if appropriate, although this was not necessary.

If someone had become distressed during the focus group, I had planned to pause the discussion and suggest a break. I would have taken the distressed participant aside to ask if they were okay and able to continue. If necessary, I would have brought an early close to the focus group and deleted the recording. I would then have remained in the school to provide all participants the opportunity to speak to me should they needed to, and would have offered to return to the school if required. This was not necessary.

3.13. Summary

The research conducted was 'exploratory', with an aim to explore the discourses around accountability measures and low-attaining pupils, and how these discourses uphold and/or challenge the structures in place that enable the system. The orientation of this research stemmed from a relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology, designed to

deliver one interpretation of the experiences of a group of teachers in one school, rather than attempt to find the 'truth'.

Seven Year 11 teachers working in a high-ranking secondary school in a large city took part in a focus group. They were read a stimulus asking them to discuss accountability measures and low-attaining pupils. The focus group was recorded and transcribed. The procedures had been trialled during a pilot study, and appropriate amendments made to the process.

The transcript was analysed using Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional framework, which is a procedure for CDA. This framework required analysis at a micro-, meso- and macro-level, the latter of which was done using a Marxist lens. A Marxist perspective was chosen due to its acknowledgement of class struggles and the influence of capitalist principles on social institutions.

A reflexive process was used, with the researcher considering and challenging their assumptions, and how this may have influenced the research process. The terms 'validity' and 'reliability' were not deemed appropriate for this study, instead the concept of 'trustworthiness' was explored in relation to the study's credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The research was granted Ethical approval by the Tavistock and Portman Trust Ethics Committee.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of the data. The findings should be read as an interpretation. For improved accessibility to the narrative, referral to the findings as an interpretation has not been repeatedly made.

The findings are presented in three sections, to correspond to each research question:

1. discourses of accountability

2. discourses of low-attaining pupils

3. discourses upholding and/or challenging the structures in place.

The overarching discourse for each research question is briefly described followed by a detailed analysis of the component dominant discourses. A summary of the findings is presented at the end of the chapter.

4.1. Analysis of discourses

For each of the three research questions, the analysis established an overarching discourse, encompassing four dominant discourses. These are summarised in Table 9 and will be discussed in succession.

Table 9

Overview of the discourses identified for each research question

Research question	Overarching discourse	Dominant discourses
What are the discourses around accountability measures?	The 'high-stakes' nature of accountability measures is pervasive and all consuming	1. Data is king 2. Pupils are tradeable goods 3. The 'battle' between being kind or being successful 4. 'I am only as good as my pupils' results'
What are the discourses around low-attaining pupils?	Low-attaining pupils are problematic, with little value	1. Low-attaining pupils lack the ability to achieve 2. Low-attaining pupils' work lacks value 3. Low-attaining pupils are sacrificed 4. Low-attaining pupils 'suffer from this model'
How do the discourses uphold and/or challenge the structures in place that enable the system?	The structures in place that enable the system are upheld through avoidance	1. Disempowerment 2. Passivity 3. What is not being said? 4. The absence of 'learning'

4.2. Discourses of accountability measures: The 'high-stakes' nature of accountability measures is pervasive and all consuming

The discourses around accountability measures were enveloped by a preoccupation with their high-stakes nature. Participants were fixated on exam result data, expressing the need to maximise results and minimise risk to themselves and the school.

This overarching discourse was demonstrated by four dominant discourses identified in relation to accountability measures.

1. Data is king

2. Pupils are tradeable goods

3. The 'battle' between being kind or being successful

4. 'I am only as good as my pupils' results'

4.2.1. Data is king

Data was a dominant discourse throughout the focus group discussion. Indeed, the word 'data' was spoken in the second sentence and was repeatedly mentioned throughout. The data that participants referred to were exam-grades, as measured through high-stakes testing. The discourse emphasised the role that 'data' plays within accountability measures; Ofsted, league tables and performance-related pay are, above all else, dependant on data. This was despite the fact that participants were in general agreement that data alone does not provide an accurate or complete measure of school performance and that the focus placed on it could be detrimental to pupils.

On several occasions during the focus group, participants disagreed on the extent to which data was fundamental to the accountability process. The exchanges ultimately resulted in participants taking up an accepted discourse that data was central to the accountability process.

In the following extract, the participants had been discussing how pupil progress in areas that are not measured by GCSEs could be overlooked, such as improved social skills:

> *Participant 1:* *Does it* [social development] *get spotted by Ofsted though?*
> *Participant 2:* *I think if they came round, you'd like to think that they would.*
> *Participant 1:* *I guess Ofsted don't see progress, but I think they do see care.*
> *Participant 2:* *Hmm.*
> *Participant 1:* *I think…*
> *Participant 2:* *More so now than they used to, I think.*
> *Participant 1:* *Right. See, I, I-, my, this is, like, my sixth year, so my only experience of Ofsted was here-*
> *Participant 2:* *Yeah.*
> *Participant 1:* *-[…] and so I guess the role that I played in that-,*
> *Participant 2:* *But it's still data-driven though, isn't it?*
> *Participant 6:* *Yeah.*
> *Participant 2:* *They still want to see-*
> *Participant 1:* *But we also had a lot of chat about-, yeah, true, yeah, it's data-driven*.
>
> *Lines 74-86*

Participant 1 was interrupted before finishing her point. She seemed to be headed towards a description of how Ofsted looked for how school staff showed 'care' towards the pupils, introducing an alternative discourse of 'other things matter to Ofsted'. By interrupting this alternative discourse with the word *"but"*, Participant 2 reaffirmed the 'data is king' discourse with her statement that Ofsted are "*data-driven*". The term 'data-driven' suggests both Ofsted and the school are being led down a path away from the aspects of school performance that are not measured by data, such as pupils' development of social skills and the "*care*" the teachers provide.

Participant 1 initially tried to resist the discourse, before accepting it entirely: "*yeah, true, yeah, it's data-driven*" in a resigned tone of voice, indicating that the alternative discourse was rejected. The difficulty Participant 1 had in accepting the 'data is king' discourse may have been due to her own personal engagement in the inspection process. She spoke about

"the role I played in that" inferring that she had a more direct function in Oak Wood's

Ofsted inspection than the other members of the focus group. Accepting the data-driven

element of the process meant admitting that she was also 'driven' by data.

A similar exchange occurred when discussing performance-related pay. Participant 1 once

again resisted the idea that data was fundamental to pay progression:

> Participant 1: *Mmm. …Is the-, but is the performance pay, [Participant 4], you might-, in my time here I don't think that my pay has only gone up based on results.*
>
> Participant 4: *No, it's not the be-all and end-all, I don't think.*
>
> *[…]*
>
> Participant 1: *No, I mean, because from my experience and from chatting to people,… pay generally does go up every year. I don't know if it's performance here.*
>
> Participant 4: *Well, the performance is everything, isn't it? So, it could be… extracurricular things that you're running, it could be-, or it's just your responsibilities-,… I said it wasn't the be-all and end-all, but actually I think-,*
>
> Participant 2: *It's always your first target, isn't it?*
>
> Participant 4: *Yeah, so if you didn't hit it-,*
>
> Participant 2: *Or you can give them a legitimate reason why you haven't hit it.*
>
> Participant 4: *It's, it's the most important thing isn't it, definitely, and everything else comes second, which, I guess, says a lot about… your role as a teacher-,*
>
> Participant 1: *Yeah.*
>
> Participant 4: *-that you have to hit that, that data point before anything else.*
>
> Participant 1: *Yeah.*
>
> *Lines 98-120*

Participant 1 introduced the idea that data (*"results"*) were not necessarily important to pay

progression, which was initially taken up by Participant 4. Whilst talking it through he

showed some doubt "*I said it wasn't the be-all and end-all, but actually I think-,*" which was immediately procured by Participant 2. Participant 4 then seemed to completely change his position by saying "*it's the most important thing*" – the term 'most' is a superlative suggesting no room for movement, which he then solidified with "*definitely*". The sudden certainty of his position did not allow for a difference of opinion, and was taken up by Participant 1 who agreed. The word "*role*" appeared again, suggesting that a focus on data does not correspond to the espoused role of a teacher.

The significance of exam data to the accountability process seemed to be an accepted discourse amongst the group. There was a tension in terms of their 'role' as a teacher and being part of the data-gathering chain.

In the following exchange, the participants discussed pupils who are given an alternate route to GCSE science:

Participant 3: *[Participant 1], you probably know, I don't know what Ofsted does to hold schools account for those kids.*

Participant 1: *We got brought into a meeting, it was the year before you joined, so it was with the ( ) co-ordinator, and they got us to pull up all our reading age data and quizzed us on what we do to support with that… Um, and then we do like mini-interventions and we had to track all the data and we had to prove that you're making progress.*

Participant 5: *Which is hard.*

Participant 1: *Or they say don't do the intervention.*

Participant 3: *Okay.*

Participant 5: *And it's so impossible to prove-,*

Participant 3: *Yeah.*

Participant 5: *Um, the impact that you're having on the small interventions over time.*

> Participant 1: *With kids who've had years and years of intervention, and things haven't improved.*
>
> Participant 5: *Yes. Yeah.*
>
> Participant 1: *It's hard work.*
>
> Participant 5: *It's really hard.*
>
> Participant 2: *Because they might make the tiniest improvement, and it's really hard to see it.*

<div align="right">

Lines 422-438

</div>

This exchange began with Participant 3 enquiring how Ofsted hold schools to account for "*those kids*" possibly referring to pupils with learning needs. Participant 1 answered the question by referring to 'data' which strengthened the previous discourse about Ofsted being 'data-driven'. However, there was not a clear view on how Ofsted held schools to account for "*those kids*". It was suggested that Ofsted looked at data, but it was not helpful to show progress. It was also unclear who they were talking about at times. Participant 1 said "*we had to track all the data and we had to prove that you're making progress*". The word "you're" is an indefinite pronoun, referring to people in general but also claims solidarity. In this context, Participant 1 seemed to be referring not only to the pupils, but the teachers' performance. By changing the pronoun there was a disconnect; it was unclear what or who the data was actually tracking – the progress of the school, staff or pupils? There was also a lack of clarity with the statement "things haven't improved". Did this refer to pupil improvement; their learning; the teaching; the school; or perhaps a combination?

Ofsted was described in an autocratic way: "*they got us to*", "*quizzed us*", "*we had to*"; all suggesting a large power differential, where the school staff had no control. Participant 5 joined the exchange and provided emotion and feeling to Participant 1's description of the process, describing it as "*hard*", which was then repeated by Participant 1. The undertone of

the conversation suggested that the "*hard work*" was trying to "*prove*" the progress through the data, rather than supporting the progress itself. The focus was on the data, not on the pupils.

The word "*prove*" was repeated within this exchange, which implies that a 'fact' needs to be substantiated. The teachers are required to prove 'improvement' which is dynamic and implies movement and change. There seemed to be a disparity between these two conflicting requirements, with Participant 5 claiming that progress is "*impossible to prove*"; the term 'impossible' suggesting an unattainable demand.

The pupils themselves were noticeably absent from the participants' discourse. The emphasis on data resulted in the pupils being overlooked and treated as a number. This phenomenon was highlighted by the following contribution:

> *Participant 7: [...]they're ranked in a way that they just become a number, and they become lost in their aspirations and their strengths in other ways, just become a number, and that's so-, like, it's not a, a well-rounded picture of them.*
>
> *Lines 187-189*

Participant 7 stressed the lack of individualism that a data-centric view creates, which was also reflected in the language she used: "*they*", "*their*" and "*them*". Such language makes it easy to overlook that she is talking about children as individuals. There was also an absence of agency – there was no mention of *who* was doing the ranking, and *how* they became a number. There was a sense that it was almost accidental; their aspirations were "*lost*"

rather than taken from them. This indicates that it is seemingly difficult for teaching staff to consider their role within a practice that they disagreed with.

In conclusion, 'data is king' was a dominant discourse, with participants emphasising the weight of exam data in terms of school accountability measures. Despite the substantial importance participants gave to data, they considered it to be an incomplete measure of performance that often resulted in some pupils being disregarded and aspects of their progress overlooked.

4.2.2. Pupils are tradeable goods

Throughout the focus group discussion, the language used conveyed that pupils were seen as objects of trade within an educational market.

Linking pupils' exam results to teachers' and schools' performance, created a discourse of competition at both an inter-school and intra-school level. Pupils judged as not able to achieve the required grades were regarded as 'risk' and were seen to impact on the school and its standing in the performance league tables (with financial implications). The participants spoke of having to make strategic decisions to mitigate these risks, which did not always have the pupils' best interests at heart.

The concept of a market was introduced explicitly by Participant 6:

> Participant 6: And also, like, schools are like a marketplace, aren't they, so it's,
> like, you know, if you're higher, then more kids will want to go,
> you can stay open, like, kids-, schools close, don't they, because

> they're not-, so, it's, like, it's, kind of, there's, like, a marketplace
> with different schools-,
>
> Participant 1: Yeah, yeah.
>
> Participant 6: -it's all very based on these very visible markers of success within a
> school, and-,
>
> *Lines 253-258*

The comparison to a "*marketplace*" seemed to refer to the introduction of market forces such as supply and demand affecting the value of a service. This emphasises the competition between schools. There was considerable weight placed on the negative risk of having a low-ranking school ("*schools close*") but it was less clear what the positive outcomes were, other than being able to 'stay open' by attracting more pupils. The risk also felt personal; the use of "*you're*" when describing the school's position personified the school. By using "*you're*" she's including herself and her colleagues, affirming that schools are not buildings or faceless institutions, but made up of people.

The "*marketplace*" also conjured images of trading – making investments by balancing risk vs gain. A similar concept was deliberated by Participant 3 when speaking about entering pupils for the GCSE foundation paper, in which the highest grade they can achieve is a 5:

> Participant 3: Yeah, it's tough to decide that actually that kid is not likely to get
> more than-, it doesn't matter if they don't get more than a 5, um,
> yeah.
>
> *Lines 377-378*

The use of "*likely*" introduced concepts of risk versus reward, with a requirement to analyse and consider risk when making decisions. It also showed that there was guesswork in the process. She clarified the school was saying "*it doesn't matter*" if the pupil did not do better

than the school's target, suggesting decisions are made with the school's best interests in

mind, rather than the pupil's. By saying "*it's tough to decide*", it implied that these strategic

decisions are made by necessity, rather than choice. Her description of it being "*tough*"

suggests a potential dissonance; there may have been a moral position to the decision that

was not considered as the focus was to maximise reward, in the form of exam results.

The term 'trading' was used explicitly when discussing decisions about whether pupils could

continue with their chosen subjects:

> *Participant 4:* *And then you're thinking ahead to whenever and just, you know. So-, which isn't fair on the student-,*
>
> *Participant 1:* *No.*
>
> *Participant 4:* *Because it's not, you know-,*
>
> *Participant 5:* *And those that are at horse-trading, are they going to pass, yes or no?*
>
> *Participant 1:* *Yeah.*
>
> *Participant 5:* *No, okay, we won't put them in the intervention, where else can we put them? Okay, we'll put them there.*
>
> *Participant 1:* *Yeah, and that horse-trading's quite brutal because it's all about who's going to get the 4, isn't it, rather than-,so I remember a kid last year who loved business. He adored the lessons, he loved the teacher, and he could come away and have all sorts of chats. When it came to horse-trading, which is a horrible phrase, he-, they decided he was going to drop business because he wasn't going to get the 4, and this kid who, it was, like, his release of the week to just go and sit and talk about business.*

Lines 135-148

'Horse-trading' was a specific reference to an annual inset day to review Year 11 data.

During this day, they identify pupils who may not pass certain subjects and make decisions

as to whether pupils would respond to extra interventions or whether to remove pupils

from subject courses if a pass mark is unlikely. It is unknown whether the term 'horse-trading' was generally used within the school, though it was used by multiple participants during the focus group without added explanation. Participant 1 commented on her disdain for the term, but used it regardless, suggesting it is at least a widely-known unofficial name for the inset day.

The term 'horse-trading' originates from the shrewd bargaining carried out when swapping horses at market, but is now more widely used in a political context. The use of the term in relation to pupils suggests that differing levels of value are placed on pupils depending on their ability to achieve their target grades. This is maximised by the strategic decisions whether or not to enter pupils into exams based on their predicted grades. When being traded, they are not seen as human beings with their own choices and independent aspirations, but as resources that can be allocated as the school sees fit, to meet its own goals.

This was also reflected in the discussion regarding the decisions made about pupils' GCSE subject entries:

> Participant 4: That decision's made quite early isn't it, Year 8 options?
> Participant 1: Very.
> Participant 4: Those kids that, say, 'I want to do history'-,
> Participant 2: They can't.
> Participant 4: -are we saying, 'I don't think you're suited to it,' which is quite early to make the decision.
> Participant 1: Yeah.
> Participant 4: But it's because you're looking at these sorts of things down the line and just thinking-,
> Participant 2: Mmm.

Participant 4: -'do we want to hedge our bets on this kid?'

Lines 155-164

The term "hedge our bets" referred to offsetting risk to avoid losses, emphasising the level of the potential cost and damage teachers felt. The consideration of "*these things down the line*" implied the need to look ahead for strategic decision making. The use of "*we*" showed the distinct positioning between staff and pupils, with teachers possessing authority and power to make decisions about pupils' lives. The decisions were being made whilst considering what would be most beneficial for the school rather than individual pupils.

The phrase "*quite early*" suggested that either the decision was being made before it *needed* to be made, or before it *should* have been made. Schools are having to think strategically about investing resources in pupils, often years before an accurate assessment of the child's potential 'ability' can be made. The word "*decision*" implied that the choice was irreversible, as it was a strategic, long-term investment. Possibly, the decision had to be made before the teacher was comfortable to do so, due to the severity of the potential risks to the school's and their own reputation.

There was also discussion of intra-school competition between teachers, with reference to trading of pupils between classes, showing how the discourse of market forces permeated through to the individual class level. The emphasis on outcomes resulted in the pupils being seen as commodities, traded to maximise individual teachers' outcomes and reward:

Participant 5: And again that comes from this, um, the high stakes, and also, um, I'm not going to mention names, but someone keeps trying to

> *put kids in my class* (laughter). *Like, someone keeps trying to move kids down from four into five, and I think-,*

Participant 4: *I've sometimes been susp-, like,-* (laughter) *-sometimes someone's said 'Oh, I think so-and-so will do really well in your group,'-*

Participant 5: *That's always a lie!*

Participant 4: *-and then I check SIMS and I'm, like, 'Hmm, hang on a minute, I don't know-* (laughter) *-I think he's better off staying where he is,' because I'm, like, just thinking ahead, and I don't know if anyone's playing that game, but, um-,*

Participant 5: *People* are *playing that game!* (Laughter) *And then, and also they were saying, 'He's really nice.' And he comes in and I'm, like, 'Ugh. You are not nice, and you're really not quite all there.' So, it's very frustrating. And then that's a burden on me.*

Lines 539-550

There was a significant amount of laughter during this exchange and a jovial atmosphere, which felt contradictory to the actual subject being discussed. The use of humour was perhaps an attempt to protect themselves against the difficult subject matter. The use of the word "*game*" trivialised the practice, and again referred to the concept of competition. This showed that accountability measures not only bred competition between institutions, but also within them. Participant 5's exclamation of "*That's always a lie!*" showed the level of distrust in the other teachers' motives and intentions.

The narrative suggests that pupils were traded to manipulate the data associated with the teachers' classes. When Participant 4 remarked "*I think he's better off*", although he was referring to the pupil, it was insinuated that it's the teacher who is 'better off'. The pupil was referred to as a "*burden*" by Participant 5, conveying a heavy load being placed on her as the pupil was "*not nice*" and "*not quite all there*". This was an assertion that good grades are not obtained due to the quality of the teaching, but due to the quality of the pupils, for whom teachers are having to bear the responsibility. Teachers who have underperforming

pupils in their class, are unable to reach their exam targets. By moving these pupils to another class – physically trading them – they seek to meet their objectives.

Considered together, it can be interpreted that the teachers are, in effect, acting as portfolio managers, making decisions on how to invest their limited resources to meet an expected level of return. The pupils are assessed as having different levels of risk attached to them, with low-attaining pupils having higher risk. The education market is skewed in terms of risk vs reward, with more significant negative outcomes (e.g. schools closing or lower pupil numbers leading to reduced funding) than positive (e.g. higher standing in the league tables). Economically, it is not prudent for schools and teachers to invest significant resources into risky endeavours that have such limited potential for gain. Investing in low-attaining pupils carries the potential for significant risk with limited chance for reward. For this reason, the main incentive is to minimise losses rather than gamble for increased success.

4.2.3. The 'battle' between being kind or being successful

The participants unveiled a discourse of polarising positions, with the term 'battle' being used as an example of this. They discussed accountability in incompatible extremes, seemingly unable to consider a 'middle ground' approach: either schools are held to account by the present measures, or they have no oversight; either schools focus on wellbeing, or they focus on academia. This resulted in a sense of disempowerment as they felt change was unachievable.

Participant 1 introduced the metaphor of a 'battle' which demonstrated the difficulty of facing polarising positions:

> *Participant 1:*   *I think […] the battle that I have in my job, is that I'm torn between wanting to make sure kids are happy, and at school, and not getting angry, and being a nice human being, but there's only so much time that I can spend on that because suddenly the ranks come along, and I'm just scrolling through a rank being, like, 'Why is he not doing well in English? Who cares if he's angry? Sort that out.' And it's, like, you've got these battling priorities, and the, kind of, the moral side of me is, like, 'This is the priority, they need to be kind, good people when they leave and go off into the community,'… but from-, because of this, actually there's not as much time that I can spend on the kind of thing that I'm morally guided to and have to spend time on the thing that-,*
>
> *Participant 6:*   *You're data-guided to.*
>
> *Participant 1:*   *-and that up above, even on-, even outside of this school tell me I have to be guided to, because I don't-, the school are just guided by the pressures that come, I think.*
>
> *Lines 551-562*

The conflicting battle was not only described in terms of the school's position, but also within herself. She talked about the "*moral side*" of her, but was unable to name the other side. By naming the one side as the 'moral' side, there was a suggestion that the focus on the data ("*ranks*") is potentially immoral. The split between the two sides was that of 'good' and 'bad' and she felt forced to "*spend time*" on the bad. She talked about the influences that told her "*I have to*", suggesting an involuntary obligation. She even named one of those pressures as coming from "*up above*", an interesting term which drew comparisons to a God-like figure with an omnipotent presence. Both her and the school seemed powerless to resist, even if it went against their 'morality'.

Polarisation occurred throughout the focus group with a seeming difficulty to consider a middle ground position. In the following quote, Participant 1 envisioned a world without accountability measures:

> *Participant 1:* […] *if you removed it all, and I don't think you can, in an ideal world you'd remove all the pressure and we would just be, like, 'Go on, have a good time, and teach them, and see where you end up.' That's not possible. But if, if a teacher could have total control over,… just, like, kids- Because you'd get something from it even if it's not an exam, right? Like, you get a story to tell if you've been in a history lesson, you get a character to inspire you. It doesn't have-, but instead we're so led by-,*
>
> *Lines 172-177*

The concept of a system without accountability measures is described as an *"ideal world"* where the focus was not on results but to "*have a good time*" and "*see where you end up*" with "*a story to tell*". Interestingly, this "*ideal*" world was referred to as one where *"you'd remove all the pressure"* suggesting that accountability measures were solely responsible for the pressure placed on schools, staff and pupils.

By saying *"and I don't think you can"* and *"that's not possible",* she acknowledged the need for some form of accountability measures and measuring of pupil progress. There was a suggestion that this resulted in an inevitable negative impact on welfare, leading to a battle between accountability and the wellbeing of both staff and pupils.

This metaphorical battle between attainment and welfare was revisited at the end of the

focus group, when discussing alternative arrangements for low-attaining pupils:

> Participant 1: We've had discussions about kids who I know would be better if
> they went off to college and did a few days-, a few have done it in
> the past, a few days of college, a few days in school, and then it's,
> like, 'But what about their results?' And it's, like, alright..., well-,
> Participant 5: Well, you can't, you can't win every battle.
> Participant 1: No. And if they go off and can be a nice human being in the world-
> Participant 5: Then you're happy.
> Participant 1: Then I think we've won.

There was agreement between Participant 1 and 5 that winning the battle meant prioritising

social and emotional development over academic results, the very thing that they voiced as

currently not being able to do. Although a seemingly hopeful sentiment to end the focus

group, the subtext was that they are actually losing the battle.

Only once during the focus group was there a suggestion of a middle ground between the

opposed positions presented:

> Participant 6: But I'm not saying there shouldn't be accountability, because
> there should, like, 'cause kids can get a really bad deal if there is
> no accountability, like, there needs to be accountability.
> Participant 1: True.
> Participant 6: But I think there are, like, particularly low-attaining that suffer
> from this model.
> Participant 1: Mmm. ...Is the-, but is the performance pay, [Participant 4], you
> might-, in my time here I don't think that my pay has only gone up
> based on results.

Lines 93-99

Participant 6 acknowledged the choice between the current accountability measures and none at all is a false dichotomy, but did not suggest an alternative. Participant 1 moved the conversation away from this possibility not only by changing the topic, but also bringing someone into the conversation who had not yet spoken.

All these narratives reveal that the complexity of national education policy, coupled with the responsibility for making potentially ethically challenging decisions, caused a sense of powerlessness that led to participants being unable to consider alternative solutions. Instead, they conceptualised the possible choices as a battle between extreme polarisations, in particular between wellbeing / social development and academia, resulting in a discourse of a 'battle' between being kind or being successful.

4.2.4. 'I am only as good as my pupils' results'

The participants spoke about the emotional impact of accountability measures. Not only did it create general stress and anxiety around the accountability measures themselves, but also damaged their self-worth as professionals, by triggering a fear of failing themselves, their pupils and their school. Participants measured their success as teachers according to their pupils' exam results.

The following extract reveals the direct impact of pupil outputs on the participants' perceptions of themselves as teachers:

> Participant 5: Yeah. But also, like, last year there was a point when we all photocopied examples of Year 10 literature essays, and we took

> *them to that meeting, and no names but we all left feeling like we*
> *were absolutely awful-,*
> Participant 6: *Awful teachers, yeah.*
> Participant 5: *-teachers, based on the quality of these essays.*
> Participant 6: *Yeah.* (Laughter)

Lines 533-859

There was a suggestion that teachers' professional value is based on pupil work production, although Participant 5 seemed to be reluctant to say by whom. By saying "*no names*" it was implicated that they were left feeling *"awful"* by individuals, rather than the wider system. She described that "*we all*" felt like "*awful teachers*", confidently speaking for all of the attendees of the meeting. The fact that all the essays were judged as not meeting "*quality*" standards raises questions about how realistic the expected standard is, especially considering Oak Wood is rated as an 'outstanding', high-performing school.

Oak Wood's high performance on accountability measures did not seem to have permeated down to the teachers' perception of their success as teachers. Instead, there was a persistent fear of not being good enough and "*failing*" others. In the following exchange, Participant 1 was talking about her "*battling priorities*" between supporting pupils' social or academic development:

> Participant 1: […] *actually there's not as much time that I can spend on the kind*
> *of thing that I'm morally guided to and have to spend time on the*
> *thing that-,*
> Participant 6: *You're data-guided to.*
> Participant 1: *-and that up above, even on-, even outside of this school tell me I*
> *have to be guided to, because I don't-, the school are just guided*
> *by the pressures that come, I think.*
> Participant 6: *And then it becomes, like, super stressful, doesn't it?*

> Participant 1: Yeah. And you feel like you're failing people, I think that's the key if you feel like you're failing people.
> Participant 6: You feel like you're failing these kids, you feel like you're failing the department.
> Participant 5: That's a lot of pressure.

<div align="right">

Lines 558-567

</div>

The term "*failing*" suggests a binary position, but what constitutes achievement was never discussed, despite the school's success. The concern with failure was personal; Participant 1's use of 'you' in "*you feel like you're failing people*" was in reference to herself, and was reiterated by Participant 6 "*you feel like you're failing these kids, you feel like you're failing the department*". They expressed personal accountability for the outcomes of large groups of people; the pupils and the school as a whole. There was no ambiguity to their statements; they did not say that it *can* feel like they're failing people, or they *sometimes* feel like they're failing people. They spoke of a definitive position; it was a constant feeling.

In the following extract, this fear of failure was attributed specifically to Progress 8, which was suggested to be a metric of failure rather than success:

> Participant 6: 'Cause we feel the stress, we're, like, 'Oh no, it's a borderline group, like, and my Progress 8 could look really bad.' Let us-, but then also, the Progress 8 helps you to measure, like, 'Did I do well by this class? Like, could this class have done better with another teacher? Like, did I fail this class?' as well.
> Participant 5: It's difficult isn't it?
> Participant 6: It's tough, it's tough, so, you've got, like, all of this stuff, and actually, it's, like, the child is super-stressed, so I think we forget their stress in our own stress because of all this stuff too.

<div align="right">

Lines 192-199

</div>

Participant 6 talked about how Progress 8 "*helps you to measure*" performance, but described it in terms of failure rather than success. Rather than measuring how well the class is doing with her, it measures whether the class could have "*done better with another teacher*". Progress 8 is not a metric for teachers' successes, but for their failures. As these measures posed a threat to teachers' self-image, this made them fear pupils who may not score well on these measures: "*oh no, it's a borderline group*". This fear suggests an acknowledgement that there is an issue with the measure itself – accountability measures are more dependent on pupils' prior attainment than the teachers' actual teaching ability. Despite recognising this, Participant 6 still internalised the results as her own personal failure. It is unclear what makes the participant view the situation in a way that contradicts her factual understanding; whether it stems from external source, such as leadership discourse, or an internal need to believe that teachers' roles are significant.

Participant 6 acknowledged how consuming the pressure was - it became such a personal threat that they sometimes overlooked the impact on pupils. She described how "*we forget their stress*" which placed responsibility on teachers, and was another example of how they were failing pupils.

There was also acknowledgement that pupils' self-worth is equally impacted by the accountability measures:

> Participant 6: *Personal accountability, school accountability, everyone's worried about their accountability, and actually I think these children feel either that they're not doing enough because they're being told, 'Oh, you should be getting this,' or, 'You could be getting this,' or by-, this is the message they get across the school, and then they feel like even if try hard, what they produce is never good enough*

*because it falls short of those kind of grades that we want them to
be getting.*

<div align="right">*Lines 40-45*</div>

Pupils were only referred to as 'children' a handful of times throughout the whole of the

focus group. The use of the term here created a rare moment of personifying their pupils,

with empathy towards pupils who are labelled as "*never good enough*" by a system that sets

an impossible standard for them. Participant 6 initially avoided agency, saying "*they're being

told*" but did not propose by whom. Later there was an admittance that the pupils were

feeling this way because they were not meeting the grades "*we want them to be getting*".

Responsibility was, once again, placed on the teachers.

The narrative revealed a discourse of damaged self-worth and a feeling of not being 'good

enough'. This created self-doubt in their ability to teach, provide support to their pupils and

contribute to the schools' goals. Their success as a teacher was only as good as their pupils'

exam results. The benchmark for success set out by accountability measures resulted in

both teachers and pupils feeling as if they were failures, despite the school performing well

across the various measures. Although the participants consciously acknowledged that the

pressures on teachers and pupils arose from accountability measures, they also blamed

themselves for the way they interacted with their pupils.

4.3. Discourses around low-attaining pupils: Low-attaining pupils are problematic, with little value

The discourses around low-attaining pupils culminated in a notion that they are problematic, lacking the ability and skills needed to achieve success in the world of education. Because of this, they are judged as holding little value to the school, resulting in them being victimised. Participants demonstrated that they consciously knew that this led to potentially unethical practices, but also seemed to hold it as an internalised view.

The overarching discourse that low-attaining pupils are seen as a problem is demonstrated by the four dominant discourses drawn from the data in relation to low-attaining pupils.

1. Low-attaining pupils lack the ability to achieve
2. Low-attaining pupils' work lacks value
3. Sacrificing low-attaining pupils
4. Low-attaining pupils 'suffer from this model'

4.3.1. Low-attaining pupils lack the ability to achieve

Low-attaining pupils were described in a variety of different ways, all of which seemed to be underpinned by the view that they did not have the intrinsic ability to access learning and thus achieve.

The term 'low-attaining' was introduced to the focus group during the introductory statement and on the prompt sheet that was visible to the participants throughout. When the participants used the term 'low-attaining', they often glanced at the prompt sheet,

suggesting that it may not have been a natural term for them to use. In fact, on several occasions, participants used the term 'low-ability' before self-correcting to 'low-attaining'. The term 'low-ability' seemed to be more organic for the participants:

Participant 1: […] *but it's giving lower-ab, low-attaining students a, a route in, isn't it?*

Line 222

Participant 6: […] *if my child was of low-ability* […]

Line 276

Participant 1: […] *I also, if you look at teaching of low-ability-, low-attaining,* […]

Line 277

Participant 3: […] *it's never the lower-ability, low-attaining-,*

Line 495

Describing the pupils as 'low-ability' suggested that participants judged that some children inherently lack the capability to learn and do well, and therefore there are limits to their future outcomes. By referring to pupils in this way, there was a personification of low expectations.

The use of the term "*lower*" also highlighted the dominance of comparison, hierarchy and competition in the discourses in education. This comparative language could lead to differing levels of worth placed on individual pupils.

In the following extract, Participant 5 was talking about teachers moving pupils into her class:

Participant 5: [...] *And then, and also they were saying, 'He's really nice.' And he comes in and I'm, like, 'Ugh. You are not nice, and you're really not quite all there.' So, it's very frustrating. And then that's a burden on me.*

Lines 548-550

The term "*not quite all there*" describes someone lacking intelligence and/or mental competence. The fact the pupil was also depicted as lacking 'ability' as well as being "*not nice*" meant that he became a "*burden*". The pupil was seen as providing no value or benefit to the teacher, instead becoming an unwanted responsibility.

The description of low-attaining children as lacking ability created a discourse of some pupils lacking the intrinsic skills and capabilities to do well. This leads to teachers and schools having low expectation of these pupils, viewing poor outcomes as inevitable and teacher input redundant.

4.3.2. Low-attaining pupils' work lacks value

The participants acknowledged that low-attaining pupils require differentiated resources and teaching during lessons. They also acknowledged that, similarly, accountability measures should be differentiated to account for these pupils. However, when participants discussed the work that low-attaining pupils produce, there was an insinuation that this work was easy to the point of it being farcical, and therefore valueless.

In the following extract, the participants were discussing the teaching of lower sets:

> *Participant 3:* And that's interesting, we don't change how much time we will allow for certain parts of the curriculum for our lower set so they have to have covered the same content in the exact same time as our set ones, and I don't know if that's reasonable to-,
>
> *Participant 2:* No, because I did-, realistically when I taught (talking over each other) *that it can take me two, three lessons to cover what the top set would cover if I wanted to teach it to them properly, or you'd cut massive chunks out of it, give them the very basics, and next on to the next lesson.*
>
> *Participant 3:* Well, that's what-,
>
> *Participant 2:* Or you teach it, they have no understanding of what you taught, and you move onto the next lesson.
>
> *Participant 1:* Yeah.
>
> *Participant 6:* Or, like, give them, like, some sentence-starters with some key words in them and they, kind of, mush it together and they have a really lovely paragraph, but they have no real understanding of what they-, what they've done.
>
> *Participant 2:* Yeah. And you have to write, like, stuff all over their books saying, you know, 'work together as a class', or 'group work' or something, so if anybody reads it, they'll look at it and, 'Wow, that's amazing,' but no (laughter). *They didn't do it themselves.*
>
> *Lines 509-525*

There was a disconnect here between the 'teaching' and 'learning' process. Participant 2 explained "*you teach it, they have no understanding of what you taught, and you move onto the next lesson*". In this context, 'teach' could have meant presenting the information required by the syllabus or even simply passing the allocated period of time for the lesson. There appeared to be no connection between the teaching and the pupils' learning. There was even an admission here that the lower sets were not being taught "*properly*", with a suggestion that it's not worth prioritising the increased effort, resources and time. Therefore, the primary objective was simply to move "*onto the next lesson*", a repeated phrase which demonstrated a 'tick-box' mentality to teaching these pupils.

There seemed to be an underlying suggestion that these pupils have limited ability to access lesson content in a meaningful way. Written work was described as "mush[ing]" the sentence-starters and key words together – a word that suggested a lack of precision and accuracy, almost childlike or animalistic. The description of pupils' paragraphs as "*lovely*" was condescending in nature. Later the group laughed at the suggestion that their work could be "*amazing*".

There was also laughter when the group discussed coursework, which low-attaining pupils are known to do better in compared to exams:

> Participant 1: *What would you do instead of GCSEs then? Would you bring back coursework?*
> Participant 6: *A little folder, a little folder of things.*
> Participant 1: (laughing and in a high pitched voice) *A little folder of work.*
> Participant 6: *A little pride folder.*
> Participant 1: (laughing) *Do a portfolio.*
> Participant 6: *Little portfolio of proud things.*
> Participant 1: *Because coursework was a chance for low-attaining students, right?*
>
> *Lines 315-321*

The participants changed their tone of voice when discussing coursework. Participant 1 laughed while describing the coursework as a "*little folder*" and "*portfolio*". The repeated use of the word "*little*" belittled the idea of coursework as well as the work that pupils might be 'proud' of. Describing it as "*a chance for low-attaining students*" suggested that this 'little' work is the only thing they are capable of.

There was a similar exchange about pupils who were given alternative routes to GCSE

science:

> Participant 2: Alright, okay. You see, the previous school I worked at, those
>   children who didn't fit the science did animal care instead.
> Participant 5: Animal care!
> Participant 2: Which was absolutely awful, it was one of the worst things I ever
>   taught in my life.
> Participant 1: That sounds amazing.
> Participant 5: Was it, like, how to-, (talking over each other)
> Participant 2: It was really hard, and they had to do about-, so they'd go and
>   visit farms, which was, you know, all very nice and lovely, but then
>   they had to say about parasites and stuff like that, and you're
>   talking about seriously low-attaining kids, 'How would you know
>   about red-eye with a rabbit?' and stuff, and all this, you know.
> Participant 1: Animal care! (Talking over each other)
> Participant 5: I thought it was something different – how to stroke them!
> Participant 6: I thought it would be- (talking over each other)
> Participant 5: How to pick up a hamster (laughter).
> Participant 2: No, it's not as nice as it sounds, unfortunately.
> Participant 6: It does sound really nice.
> Participant 5: It does.
>
> *Lines 403-421*

Even after Participant 2 described it as "*really hard*", there were still jokes about how they

thought the course would be about *"how to stroke"* animals or *"how to pick up a hamster"*,

as if this was all the pupils were capable of. Rather than imagining an age-appropriate, skills-

based curriculum, the participants imagined condescending activities that would be

expected of an early-years syllabus.

The descriptions of work produced by low-attaining pupils highlighted the low-expectations

the teachers had of these pupils. The participants belittled the achievements of the pupils

because they were not producing the 'high-quality' academic work valued by the education

system and measured by accountability measures. The participants felt confident and comfortable describing low-attaining pupils' work in a condescending fashion in front of each other, and whilst being recorded by a professional associated with SEN. This highlights the degree of the intrenchment of the view that the work of low-attaining pupils lacks value. The participants consciously want low-attaining pupils to do well and have their achievements recognised, but they appeared to have internalised the view that only 'academic' work holds merit.

4.3.3. Low-attaining pupils are sacrificed

The participants discussed the necessity of making decisions that ultimately sacrificed low-attaining pupils for the sake of meeting the standards set out by the accountability measures. The following exchange occurred when discussing performance management targets:

> Participant 4: Well, you almost identify students in your class when you know the percentage that you're required to get.
> Participant 1: Yeah, yeah.
> Participant 4: And I know it's bad, but you almost pick people out and say, 'No chance.'
> Participant 6: Mmm.
> Participant 1: Yeah.
> Participant 4: And then you're thinking ahead to whenever and just, you know. So-, which isn't fair on the student-,
> Participant 1: No.
> Participant 4: Because it's not, you know-,
>
> *Lines 129-138*

Participant 4's use of the word "*you*" acted to include everyone in this practice. Participants 1 and 6 corroborated this, suggesting it was widespread. Participant 4 also changed his

language from describing the pupils as "*students*" to the more depersonalised term

"*people*", perhaps as an attempt to not think of them as children when saying they had "*no*

chance". The term "*students*" highlighted the responsibility of the teacher for the pupil's

learning, whereas the term "*people*" removed this connection. By saying "*no chance*", he

was not referring to his ability to teach the pupil, but their ability to learn.

There was an acknowledgement that this practice was "*bad*" and "*isn't fair*", but there was

no attempt to explain why this occurred, simply repeating "*you know*". It suggested an

unspoken, but widely held belief that such trade-offs are a required part of teaching. The

use of the word "*required*" indicated that the practice originated from a higher authority,

which was impossible to oppose.

This need to discard pupils was also discussed by Participant 1, with regard to the English

Bachelorette (Ebacc) used for league tables:

> *Participant 1: The Ebacc, and a lot of your data comes from that, right? The*
> *school data,-*
> *Participant 5: Yeah*
> *Participant 1: -and all of them are more academic subjects. I remember last year*
> *when we were doing the SEN data, we were going through all the*
> *students and it was, like, 'Right, they don't count towards the*
> *Ebacc, don't count towards the Ebacc, don't count towards the*
> *Ebacc,' and it was just like,-*
> *Participant 5: Brutal*
> *Participant 1: 'Right, we don't need to talk about them, they don't count towards*
> *the Ebacc,' and it was because the, the school is under a pressure*
> *because they know their names are going to be published and*
> *presented nationally, and if a school that is top of the country,*
> *which this was at one point, falls, then they're, like, 'Ahhh, we're*
> *not, we're not so good any more,' like.*

There was a clear conflict here between the needs of the pupils and the needs of the school. Participant 1 talked about the overwhelming focus of the school on maintaining its very visible presence in the league tables. The low-attaining pupils were not included in a critical accountability metric, which significantly reduced their 'value' and deprioritised them for resources and additional support because *"they don't count"*. They are dismissed to the point that they "*don't need to talk about them*". The awareness that the practice was 'wrong' was nevertheless presented as a necessity to hit targets. Participant 5's description of it being *"brutal"* served to highlight that this practice was harsh to the point of cruelty.

Downgrading or 'sacrificing' low-attaining pupils appeared to occur widely within the school:

Participant 1: *[…] I also, if you look at teaching of low-ability-, low-attaining, it sometimes doesn't get the attention that it needs. So, there's-, and I think comes from that feeling of, like, 'I'm not sure these students are going to get it so-,'*

Participant 5: *Less planning goes into it, less thought and consideration.*

Participant 1: *Yeah.*

Participant 2: *And really you should be putting the stronger teachers-,*

Participant 6: *Oh, totally.*

Participant 2: *-in there to help them boost their levels, not-, no disrespect to anybody but that would be, like, an NQT or somebody who will get-,*

Participant 4: *Yeah, I mean, we often put non-specialists with really low sets in Year 7, and-,*

Participant 5: *Trainees are always with the-, those sets as well.*

Participant 4: *Just because it's deemed-, yeah, I don't know. It's not easier, is it, but less important, I don't know.*

Participant 5: *Less important, and the stakes are not as high.*

> *Participant 1: Yeah.*
> *Participant 4: Yeah.*
> *Participant 5: So, therefore we can dispose of these periods with this trainee.*
> *Participant 1: Mmhmm. I think sometimes it is deemed easier, and I think they think there might be a bit less planning because they move slower.*
> *Participant 2: But it's not though, it's more I think, far more. Far more.*
>
> *Lines 277-296*

This exchange reaffirmed the de-prioritisation of low-attaining pupils and defined the harsh realities this practice leads to. Their teaching was described as not getting *"the attention that it needs"*, with *"less thought and consideration"* and being taught by *"non-specialists"* or *"trainees"*. Participant 5's highly evocative phrase *"we can dispose of these periods"*, suggested these lessons are considered to have no value to the school and seen as 'rubbish' or 'waste'. Additionally, the use of 'we' held the participants accountable for this practice. This led to Participant 1 bringing in an unknown external source of the cause "*I think they think*" – without naming who 'they' are, deflecting responsibility for the potentially immoral practice onto an unnamed, higher authority. Similarly, when Participant 1 did not finish her sentence "*'I'm not sure these students are going to get it so-'*", it conveys a hesitancy to face the consequences of this practice through verbalisation.

Low-attaining pupils were also sacrificed in terms of the subjects they were able to study:

> *Participant 3: Or even the fact that we, from Year 7 or 8, as soon as they go into the end of Year 8, we decide whether they can even only just sit physics, so they would only sit a physics exam.*
> *Participant 5: Oh, yeah, yeah.*
> *Participant 3: There's arguments both side of that as well, but we decide that pretty early, unlike the-, which entries that we, we enter them into the exam, then-,*

> *Participant 6:* *'Cause the, the low-attaining students are all just put in for physics, aren't they?*
>
> *Participant 3:* *They're all just put in for physics, they don't do any biology or any chemistry.*
>
> *Participant 1:* *'Cause it's the most fun obviously* (laughter)
>
> *Participant 6: Physics is the worst one!*
>
> *Participant 1:* *Horrible.*
>
> *Participant 6:* *I'd have thought it would be the other way round* (talking over each other).
>
> *Participant 1:* *Awful.*
>
> *Participant 6:* *Go for biology.*
>
> *Participant 3:* *It needs less literacy… and actually their maths is quite strong so they tend to do better with the physics in this school.*
>
> *Participant 2:* *So you don't do-, because you do the triple, don't you, and then there, there's a double, but you don't do that?*
>
> *Participant 3:* *Mmm, well, we do, but then we take, um, those who we don't think will be able to cope with either of those, and we just teach them physics, from quite early on, and they only sit the physics exam.*
>
> *Lines 388-402*

Participant 3 described how some pupils at Oak Wood were deprived of receiving any biology or chemistry education from the beginning of Year 9. The discussion that followed was about the fact that physics, which is seen as a difficult subject, was the science selected for them to study, rather than the fact that their science education was restricted.

The exchange placed pupils in a passive position: "*we decide whether they can*", "*they're all just put in for physics*", "*we just teach them physics*". The pupils were not a part of this process; they had no choice in the decision and did not even seem to be involved in the teaching and learning process. Although Participant 3 described pupils being unable to "*cope*" with biology and chemistry, it was unclear what exactly she is referring to. She

mentioned how they "*tend to do better*" which suggested the issue was viewed entirely through the lens of exam results and accountability measures, not pupils' learning.

Overall, the participants described widespread and established practices, in which significant decisions about low-attaining pupils were made to mitigate the impact of their 'poor' data on school accountability measures. These decisions included actively deprioritising them, directing resources away from them, and limiting their access to education. There was general agreement among the participants that these practices were ethically wrong, but necessary sacrifice to ensure the school's success.

4.3.4. Low-attaining pupils 'suffer from this model'

There was general consensus amongst the teachers that the metrics used to track success were not appropriate for all children, and do not fully represent pupil progress. The accountability measures in place have a narrow definition of ability and progress and ignore critical non-academic factors, which is disproportionately punitive to low-attaining pupils:

> Participant 6: But I'm not saying there shouldn't be accountability, because there should, like, 'cause kids can get a really bad deal if there is no accountability, like, there needs to be accountability.
> Participant 1: True.
> Participant 6: But I think there are, like, particularly low-attaining that suffer from this model.
>
> *Lines 93-97*

Participant 6 suggested that *"kids can get a really bad deal"* without accountability measures, but that low-attaining pupils *"suffer from this model"* which suggested that some 'kids' are already getting a 'bad deal'. This implies that the current accountability measures

are in place to protect certain pupils; ones who meet the academic standards deemed

acceptable and valuable. Accountability measures are not in place to improve education for

all children.

There was recognition that low-attaining pupils' achievements were discounted by the

system:

> Participant 2: *But then it's also the ones who, I don't know, like the-, like, the weakest ones who… may not score particularly well, however they've learnt how to communicate better with somebody-*
> Participant 1: *Mmm.*
> Participant 2: *-then they can now have strong, good conversation by saying, you know, 'Good morning, how are you? Der, der, der, der,' but nobody marks them for that.*
> Participant 1: *Yeah.*
> Participant 2: *But that's-, that could be a massive achievement for them. But, you know, you're not going to get a GCSE in it.*
>
> *Lines 65-73*

Participant 2 highlighted how the data driven approach is centred and normalised around

pupils of an average 'ability'. It relies upon assumptions of the academic levels that pupils

should demonstrate at certain ages. The important outcomes and achievements that some

pupils make are ignored because they are being judged on criteria that is inappropriate for

them. Pupils being overlooked is also reflected in the language: by referring to pupils as

"*the ones*" rather than 'children' or 'kids' or 'students' depersonalises them and confirms

that they are unimportant.

By the current metrics, it is more important to "*get a GCSE*" than it is to make real progress

in areas that can have a significant impact on pupils' lives. By focusing on data and

measurable outcomes, the schools' focus is diverted to what can be 'marked', rather than

the actual learning and development of pupils. The participants acknowledged concern that

the emphasis on measuring pupil achievement through exams, had a negative effect on the

wellbeing of pupils who do not meet the standards:

> *Participant 1: But, is there an alternative? 'Cause we went from this system whereby there was coursework, there was a lot more support, to this system where now everything is assessed at the end of two or three years of work, and then you've got some students who get to the end of that with no GCSEs. It's, like, 'Well, what was the point of 8, 9 and 11 if all they've been working towards is this that makes them feel like absolute duds?'*
>
> *Lines 333-337*

Questioning what is the "point" of education if students end up without GCSEs, revealed

that the current education policy was viewed as being solely focused on pupil achievement

rather than learning. Here, if there is not an observed outcome determined by the measures

in place, then there hasn't been any positive achievements. There was also an

acknowledgement that the issue is the narrow focus on exam outcomes - "*if all they've been*

working towards is this" - suggesting that if pupils were allowed to work towards other

competences, they would be able to show achievement and outcomes.

Participant 1 also emphasised that there were two main impacts on these pupils; the lack of

qualifications and also the emotional impact. She described them as feeling like "*absolute*

duds", a term that encompasses feelings of worthlessness and failure.

The impact on pupils was discussed at various points during the focus group with the teachers also reflecting on their own contribution within the system. When asked about how accountability measures may affect them, Participant 6 responded:

> *Participant 6: It's, like, makes you more tense as it creeps up and you see those kids, and you're, like, 'Oh, I thought you could have got 4 but you've not made the progress that I expected,' and they take that stress on. I've had kids break down in tears… because of this,… and you don't go, 'How are you?' you go, 'Why haven't you started that with a quote?' Do you know what I mean?*
>
> *Lines 528-532*

The language used by Participant 6 is highly emotive. The descriptions of "*tense*" and "*creeps up*" emulated language of a thriller or horror, conjuring images of a foreboding and ominous figure. Admitting that pupils "*break down in tears*" shows the depth of their distress and her empathy for them. The silent pause that followed felt poignant. Whereas throughout the focus group, participants frequently filled silences and spoke over each other, they allowed this silence to land, perhaps implying an agreement and/or mutual concern about this matter.

Pupils suffered an emotional toll, not only from getting poor grades, but also from the decisions imposed on them to avoid those poor grades:

> *Participant 1: […] so I remember a kid last year who loved business. He adored the lessons, he loved the teacher, and he could come away and have all sorts of chats. When it came to horse-trading, which is a horrible phrase, he-, they decided he was going to drop business because he wasn't going to get the 4, and this kid who, it was, like, his release of the week to just go and sit and talk about business.*

> Participant 5: And so, like, if you're in a situation like that, when [name] comes to being in Year 11 and everyone's saying, 'No, chuck him out.' Like, how would you cope with that?
> Participant 1: It would be brutal, wouldn't it?
> Participant 5: It would be so horrible.
> Participant 1: But, if you look… I think probably if you look at a lot of schools nationally,… the approach with kids who aren't going to get… the 4, is it to, like-,
> Participant 4: That decision's made quite early isn't it, Year 8 options?
> Participant 1: Very.

Lines 144-156

Participant 1 highlighted how strategic decisions made by the school were made independently of the pupil's best interests and their personal preferences. The pupil was removed from a subject he *"loved"* and *"adored"* because *"they decided he was going to drop business"*. The decision was not made by the pupil, but by an unnamed authority referred to only as *"they"*. This example highlighted how the school was willing to remove a motivating and enjoyable experience from a pupil who demonstrated interest in learning (*"he could come away and have all sorts of chats"*) because it was judged that he lacked the ability to meet a minimum acceptable standard (*"because he wasn't going to get the 4"*). The pupil's wellbeing was sacrificed for the good of the school.

This exchange was the only time during the focus group that a specific, named pupil was mentioned and discussed. Following this discussion, Participant 5 asked "how would you cope with that" rather than 'how did you cope with that'. By exploring the emotions in a hypothetical way, she may have been trying to avoid an uncomfortable image. Interestingly, there was no consideration of the pupils' feelings, with no question of 'how would *he* cope

with that'. The participants went on to say it "would be" *"brutal"* and *"horrible"*, as if not wanting to acknowledge and admit the consequences this event had on the pupil.

Participant 1 moved the conversation away from the practice in their school to a national level with a "*but*". The difficult emotions were perhaps easier to *"cope with"* if it was a practice undertaken nationally, rather than just in their school, by her colleagues. However, even with this distance, her sentence was left unfinished, with Participant 4 interrupting.

In conclusion, there was a broadening of the previous discourse that accountability measures damage self-worth, to suggest that low-attaining pupils are significant casualties of this. The accountability system dictates a narrow definition of pupil achievement, through high exam grades, and dismisses any other type of accomplishment. The decisions that schools make for pupils that they judge as low-attaining have a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing and future life chances, but this impact is brushed aside as schools are totally focused on academic measures and success.

4.4. How the discourses uphold and/or challenge the structures in place that enable the system: The structures in place that enable the system are upheld through avoidance

The participants were outwardly critical of the accountability measures in place, and openly disagreed with the focus on data. They were critical of the accuracy of such measures on school performance and the resultant emotional impact this had on low-attaining pupils and themselves. Despite this, the discourses revealed that the participants seemingly internalised the core principles behind the accountability measures and worked to uphold

the structures of system. They avoided acknowledging unethical practices that occurred as a result of accountability measures, and the impact these had on pupils. Participants also felt powerless to influence or challenge the system.

The discourses upholding these structures were:

1. Disempowerment

2. Passivity

3. What is not being said?

4. The absence of 'learning'

4.4.1. Disempowerment

The participants expressed frustration with the accountability measures in place, reflecting on the negative impacts on themselves and the pupils. However, underpinning these reflections was a feeling of disempowerment and hopelessness at their inability to change the system:

> Participant 1: Yeah, though I think that you can put a lot of onus on a teacher for making it-,… if the way that it is-, if you removed it all, and **I don't think you can**, in an ideal world you'd remove all the pressure and we would just be, like, 'Go on, have a good time, and teach them, and see where you end up.' **That's not possible**. But if, if a teacher could have total control over,… just, like, kids- Because you'd get something from it even if it's not an exam, right? Like, you get a story to tell if you've been in a history lesson, you get a character to inspire you. It doesn't have-, but instead **we're so led by-,**
>
> *Lines 171-177*

Participant 6: *Like, we've, we've privileged academic subjects, we don't have,
like, a kind of thing outside of thing-, um, school where things
that aren't so academic are valued as highly as they should be.*

Participant 1: *Mmm.*

Participant 6: *And I think that just feeds down, **I don't know how you change
it** in the current way we are.*

Lines 203-208

Participant 3: *I struggle with that because I know how much I should be doing
for my low sets, because I teach bottom set 8 and bottom set 7,
and I know how much planning it requires yet **do not have the
capacity to do it.** And my capacity is put into A level because **if I
didn't** meet those Alps3 targets, which is on my performance
management-,*

Lines 297-300

Participant 1: *I think […] the battle that I have in my job, is that I'm torn
between wanting to make sure kids are happy, and at school,
and not getting angry, and being a nice human being, but
there's only so much time that I can spend on that because
suddenly the ranks come along, and I'm just scrolling through a
rank being, like, 'Why is he not doing well in English? Who cares
if he's angry? Sort that out.' And it's, like, you've got these
battling priorities, and the, kind of, the moral side of me is, like,
'This is the priority, they need to be kind, good people when
they leave and go off into the community,'… but from-, because
of this, actually **there's not as much time that I can spend on
the kind of thing that I'm morally guided to and have to spend
time** on the thing that-,*

Participant 6: *You're data-guided to.*

Participant 1: *And that up above, even on-, even outside of this school tell me
I have to be guided to, because I don't-, the school are just
guided by the pressures that come, I think.*

Lines 551-562

The narrative revealed how the participants were unhappy with the way that schools and teachers were forced to practice, but felt there was little they could do to stop it. This led to an acceptance of the inevitability of current practices, which ultimately upheld the structures in place.

4.4.2. Passivity

The participants often spoke in a passive voice when talking about the negative effects of accountability measures, including what can be considered unethical practice. Pronouns were avoided so that the agent of these practices were unclear, as demonstrated in the following quotes:

> *Participant 1: I, […], part of my job is to review Year 11 data at the end of-…, after GCSEs, and SEN data has traditionally not been very good. Now, I don't think that that's on account of… individual, kind of, teaching… because I think as individuals we all really care about that. I think probably…* ***it's the fault of… things like this*** *that can hinder progress… and I've got to formulate this thought before I say it… Because if we're thinking about, like with, um,… the league tables and stuff, some of it's based on, like, where kids go next, right? That can dictate how you're doing nationally. It's, like, what kids have got five A*-C, or now 9-4, what kids have gone on to do academic A levels. Kids who may not achieve those 9-4,…* ***do they just, kind of, get overseen*** *because it's, like, 'Well that kid's not going to get near the 4 that-, the 4 that we need,… and so therefore that isn't going to take the energy that, say, this mid set are going to get because it's a good chance that they'll get 4s'? So, are we just so driven by the data at the end, that it can, kind of, mean that kids… lose out?*
>
> *Lines 16-28*

*Participant 2: They're, sort of,… not necessarily **tossed aside**, but-,*

Line 35

*Participant 6: They could get a 4 if they really, like, smashed it but the-they are so stretched, and I think in all of the, like, (inaudible), like, teachers' personal concerns about performance-related pay, all of that, the actual child and how they feel, like, the moments of being, like, proud of something, or-, **get forgotten** a lot.*

Lines 47-50

*Participant 3: Um, yes, but then **the decision** to put a kid into a foundation exam is capping them at a 5.*

Lines 369-370

By not assigning responsibility to individuals, the participants disassociated themselves, their colleagues and their school from these practices. They either did not notice how, or were possibly denying how, these practices occurred. This detachment may be a way of managing their disapproval of these practices, but it ultimately upholds the structures. The passive voice colludes with a depersonalised education system that views children as data producers that can be analysed and manipulated, rather than as individuals who can learn and develop.

4.4.3. What is not being said?

The participants often did not finish their sentences when talking about the negative effects on pupils. By not articulating the details of what takes place, the participants were avoiding having to face up to their practices:

Participant 2: They're, sort of,… not necessarily tossed aside, but-,

Line 35

Participant 4: It's, it's the most important thing isn't it, definitely, and
everything else comes second, which, I guess, says a lot about…
your role as a teacher-,

Lines 116-117

Participant 4: And then you're thinking ahead to whenever and just, you
know. So-, which isn't fair on the student-,
Participant 1: No.
Participant 4: Because it's not, you know-,

Lines 135-138

Participant 4: Just because it's deemed-, yeah, I don't know. It's not easier, is
it, but less important, I don't know.

Lines 288-289

Participant 3: I have one more. Performance-related pay is always on my top
classes, I don't know if anyone else-, my targets are always for
my set ones and twos, never are they for my lower sets.
Participant 5: Interesting.
Participant 3: And I think that sends quite-,

Lines 483-487

By avoiding articulating the negative effects that accountability measures and its associated unethical practices have on low-attaining pupils, the participants evaded confronting these practices, and ultimately continued to uphold the structures of the current system.

4.4.4. The absence of 'learning'

The word 'learn' was distinctly absent from the narrative – it was only used twice

throughout the whole of the focus group discussion. Instead, the focus was on

performativity, with outcomes discussed in terms of observable outputs:

> *Participant 1:* *And I guess also, because **what we're constantly working towards is the exam at the end**, right?*
> *Participant 6:* *Yeah.*
> *Participant 1:* *How often can you just, like, pause in your practice and be like, 'Let's do something… fun-*
> *Participant 6: (laughs)*
> *Participant 1: -or, like, let's hear your opinions on something'? Like, every lesson's like, 'Right, that's the exam, we've got it in eight months' time, let's go.' And that's because we constantly feel this pressure, right?*
> *Group:* *Mmm.*
> *Participant 5: It's horrible*
>
> <div align="right">Lines 54-64</div>

Participant 1 suggested that the ultimate goal of school was for pupils to pass exams, rather

than to learn. There was laughter at the idea of 'fun' and a suggestion that hearing pupils'

opinions was equally as absurd.

> *Participant 1:* *But, is there an alternative? 'Cause we went from this system whereby there was coursework, there was a lot more support, to this system where now everything is assessed at the end of two or three years of work, and then you've got some students who get to the end of that with no GCSEs. It's, like, 'Well, **what was the point** of 8, 9 and 11 if all they've been working towards is this that makes them feel like absolute duds?'*

By questioning the *"point"* of school without the awarding of GCSEs, it opened up a query as

to the purpose of secondary school. The suggestion is that the *"point"* of education is to

achieve qualifications, rather than to develop and learn. Qualifications are the only measure

of output that is valued - if qualifications had not been gained, any learning that had

occurred was pointless.

> Participant 2: Just because they might not be very good at the exam, doesn't mean they wouldn't **pick up all the information and verbally be able to tell it**.
>
> Participant 1: Mmhmm.
>
> Participant 2: And do all that sort of stuff, and actually **participate** probably a lot better in the class than some other children.
>
> Participant 1: Mmhmm.
>
> Participant 2: But they just can't answer the exam questions
>
> *Lines 178-184*

'Learning' was described as the ability to repeat information by "*pick[ing] up all the*

information" and then *"tell[ing] it"* and/or being able to *"participate"*. The focus was on

observable outcomes which could be measured.

> Participant 2: It needs more,.. all the entry level courses, they've all disappeared. It needs lots more of those put back in as a better second ( )- (talking over each other).
>
> Participant 1: But, the thing is alongside that there's got to be credibility as well (talking over each other) *so there needs to be a whole shift.*
>
> Participant 2: Yeah, so then there's still that, um, you know, assessment goes on, that, you know, you know, I've taught those in the past, and you still have to do the assessment, and you have to send it in and they want to see examples of the work, and, you know, you can't just, like, tick, done.
>
> Participant 1: Yeah.
>
> Participant 2: 'Cause that's almost, that's what people think, that entry courses are, 'Oh, you do a little bit of work, bit of coursework or whatever, you might have a sheet that the teacher signs at the end and you're done,' it's-, yes, it's not-, it's seen as not as rigorous.
>
> Participant 1: Yeah.

> Participant 2: But then there are courses out there that are **very rigorous**, that **they make you fill out all these forms** and you have to do **witness statements**, and you have to, err, then send it in and it has to be **moderated externally** and then sent back to you.
>
> *Lines 338-353*

The *"credibility"* of courses was described as those that are *"very rigorous"*. The 'rigorousness' was described as there being lots of paperwork such as *"forms"* and *"witness statements"*. There was no mention of the actual content of the courses or what the pupils learned. This shows an internalised belief of the reliability of measured outputs and performativity, rather than the fundamental principles of learning.

During the discussion, the term 'learn' was used to describe an absence of learning, which was a consequence of the way that accountability measures dictated the teacher's chosen allocation of scarce planning time:

> Participant 3: I struggle with that because I know how much I should be doing for my low sets, because I teach bottom set 8 and bottom set 7, and I know how much planning it requires yet do not have the capacity to do it. And my capacity is put into A level because if I didn't meet those Alps3 targets, which is on my performance management-, […] -which is not going to happen anyway, um, then I mean, that's, that's where I'm held to account, um, and that makes me feel awful because those kids aren't getting the lessons that could actually-, they could enjoy for one, **and learn something** from them.
>
> *lines 464-473*

The only other occasion the term 'learn' was used was to indicate that pupils could gain knowledge, skills and experiences that could be relevant to their future, although these were not captured through the accountability measures:

> *Participant 2:* *But then it's also the ones who, I don't know, like the-, like, the weakest ones who… may not score particularly well, however they've learnt how to communicate better with somebody.*
>
> *Lines 65-67*

The absence of the word 'learn' in the discussion suggests an internalisation of a discourse around performing and observable outputs that can be tracked by data. This data is valued above pupils' learning experiences. The participants' apparent assimilation of the view that exam performance supersedes true learning, works to uphold the power structures in place.

4.5. Summary

The discussion about accountability measures embraced an overarching discourse of the 'high-stakes' nature which felt all-consuming. Participant discourses fixated on the concept of 'exam data', which had become the overriding focus of the school, as it acted as a currency in the school market-place. This led the school and teachers to make strategic decisions, such as 'trading' pupils between classes, subjects and exam entries, to minimise the risk of low-attaining pupils' performance affecting school accountability data. This practice was implemented by participants despite the prevalent belief that it harms those pupils' interests and wellbeing.

The participants were clearly frustrated with the current system, describing a 'battle' in terms of how they would like to teach in contrast to how they are required to practice. They expressed how these measures led to damaged self-worth in relation to their professional capacity, leading to a constant fear of 'failing' their pupils, colleagues and school.

Low-attaining pupils were ultimately discussed as being problematic. Their low-attainment was judged to be due to a lack of innate ability, resulting in their work being dismissed as having little value. Consequently, available resources were rationed, with low-attaining pupils often 'sacrificed' to prioritise pupils who can produce the required exam data to help the school meet their accountability targets. There was a conscious acknowledgement that this system was disproportionately punitive to low-attaining pupils, damaging their wellbeing and future prospects.

Although the participants were critical of the system and the way low-attaining pupils were viewed and treated, ultimately their discourses upheld the current accountability system and power structure. Their use of language placed them in a position of disempowerment, lacking autonomy to make any changes. Participants were also reluctant to name the agents of unethical practices, which led to disassociation. Similarly, participants often did not finish their sentences when talking about unethical practices, avoiding facing up to the realities of what was occurring in their schools and deflecting personal responsibility. There was an apparent internalisation that exam performance is the ultimate goal of education, highlighting a culture driven by data, where 'learning' and the wellbeing of children is not incentivised.

5. Discussion

This chapter discusses the research findings in the context of social structures within English education, using a Marxist lens to explore these influences. These are then considered in relation to the findings of the literature review.

It also considers the implications for EP practice, the limitations of the study, dissemination of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

5.1. 'Explanation' of findings

The third level of Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional framework is the 'explanation' level, which illuminates how discourses are determined by social structures. The discourses described in the findings were therefore considered in relation to the neoliberal governing philosophy currently underpinning education policy. The Marxist lens also explored how material and economic practices shaped this.

Through this analysis, two overarching themes emerged:

1. Pupils as commodities
2. Cognitive dissonance

5.1.1. Pupils as commodities

Education policy, formed under a neoliberal ideology, has sought to create an open, competitive market, with the aim of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of schools

(Stevenson, 2011; Williams, 2017). The findings of the focus group illustrated that these principles have permeated down into the discourses of teachers. The findings also showed that the marketisation of schools has led to pupils being viewed as commodities and exam data as currency. This has resulted in differing levels of value being placed on pupils, depending on the exam results that they are able to produce.

5.1.1.1. Marx's view of commodities

A commodity is something that is bought or sold because it is useful. Marx's analysis on commodities (Marx, 1976) revealed that commodities have two types of value: use-value and exchange-value. Use-value refers to how much value the actual use of the commodity has (e.g. a teabag being able to produce a pleasing warm beverage, a painting being able to produce joy from the aesthetic), and exchange-value finds a mirror of its value in money (e.g. how much a tea bag or painting costs).

Money in itself is a commodity but holds no use-value. Instead, all other commodities are translated into money in terms of exchange-value. Marx argued that "as use-values, commodities differ above all in quality, while as exchange-values they can only differ in quantity, and therefore do not contain an atom of use-value" (Marx, 1976, p128). This means that commodities are compared by measuring their exchange-value (money) rather than their use-value, which is what qualitatively makes them different. Two commodities that share the same monetary worth are considered to be of the same value, regardless of their unique use-values. A tea bag and painting are incomparable when looking at use-value as they are useful in completely distinctive ways. However, when looking at exchange-value, a teabag is seen as less valuable than a painting, as it is significantly cheaper.

Marx highlighted that objects, as commodities, do not naturally exist in nature. In order for a tea bag or painting to exist, it requires human labour. As a result, human labour within itself has become a commodity which is bought and sold in the labour market. Just as objects lose their unique use-value when their exchange-values are used as a comparison point, so do humans: "the work of the proletarians [working-class] has lost all individual character" (Marx & Engels, 1888 p227).

The findings illustrate that within the education context, pupils, and their labour, are seen as commodities, with exam data being the exchange-value, i.e. the equivalent of money. Data (in terms of exam grades) dominated the discussions with a discourse of 'data is king'. It was described as *"the most important thing isn't it, definitely, and everything else comes second"* (Participant 4, line 116). Exam data was described as driving the market in terms of Ofsted *"it's data driven"* (Participant 1, line 86) and league tables *"it's all very based on these very visible markers of success"* (Participant 6, line 258). There was acknowledgement that pupil accomplishments which cannot be measured and demonstrated as data are disregarded *"that could be a massive achievement for them. But, you know, you're not going to get a GCSE in it."* (Participant 2, lines 72-73). Data generated by exams is the ultimate goal of schools *"what we're constantly working towards is the exam at the end, right?"* (Participant 1, lines 54-55).

The notion of pupils as commodities was revealed by the discourse that developed: pupils are tradeable goods within the school marketplace. Pupils hold use-value and exchange-value. Their use-value is based on the unique qualities that make them an individual, which

Participant 6 described as "*the actual child and how they feel*" (line 49). This can include

qualities such as being "*a nice human being"* (Participant 1, line 553), or being able to have

"strong, good conversation" (Participant 2, line 69), or strengths in areas not measured via

GCSEs. Pupils' exchange-value, on the other hand, is based on the exam data they produce

through their grades. The market, created by accountability measures, is constructed solely

on the pupils' exchange value. As a result, their use-value and all their unique qualities, are

not taken into consideration, as described by Participant 7:

> […]they're ranked in a way that they just become a number, and they become
> lost in their aspirations and their strengths in other ways, just become a number,
> and that's so-, like, it's not a, a well-rounded picture of them.
>
> (Lines 187-189)

5.1.1.2. Who determines exchange-value?

Marx and Engels (1888) proposed that society is led by the bourgeoisie (ruling-class) who

exploit the proletariat (working-class) for their own profit and to preserve their power. The

ruling-class determines what commodities are considered valuable and takes control of

their 'production'. This refers to both the material and intellectual production of

commodities. Marx proposed that as long as society engages in value production, there will

always be class control by those who own the means of production, whether in the form of

private property or state control.

In the context of education, the ruling-class is composed of politicians and other policy

makers who set the standards of what is considered 'valuable', who Participant 1 described

as those "*up above"* (line 561). The current education system's accountability measures

began under Thatcher's government in the 1980s and has been retained and adapted by all

subsequent governments (Ball, 2008; Kulz, 2017; Stevenson, 2011; Stevenson & Wood, 2013). The current educational policies define academic attainment as the ideal standard of pupil achievement, which is measured through high-stakes testing (Hutchings, 2015; Leckie & Goldstein, 2016). By setting these measures, they have privileged certain goals and qualities over others, to determine which pupil outcomes are valuable (Ball, 2008; Reid & Valle, 2004).

Marx wrote that "the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society" (Marx & Engels, 1888 , p222). Ball (2008) suggested that the move to regarding academic attainment as the 'ideal' is due to the development of the knowledge economy. The economic climate is no longer reliant on physical labour due to technological advancements. Instead, the economy is reliant on jobs that involve information and knowledge, causing society to value academic achievement: "*we've privileged academic subjects, we don't have, like, a kind of thing outside of thing-, um, school where things that aren't so academic are valued as highly as they should be*" (Participant 6, lines 203-205).

Accordingly, the ruling-class' success and power is conditional on a working-class that produces information and knowledge commodities. The ruling-class' powers also relies on schools (and pupils) to produce the indicators of success to justify their own authority and position. High-stakes exams and the data they produce have become an efficient way to measure the acquisition of information and knowledge, and a marker of political parties'

success, which has led to exam data becoming the exchange-value through which pupils are compared.

5.1.1.3. Pupil investment

Commodities often require investment before they are able to provide value. For example, a new smart phone requires extensive investment in the form of design, manufacturing and marketing before it is able to generate profit. Similarly, for pupils to produce value as a commodity, they require investment in the form of teaching and resources.

The ruling-class determines not only what's valuable but also provides the resources that can then be invested. In England, the resources provided to schools are limited. School spending per pupil in England has fallen by 9% in real terms between 2009–10 and 2019–20, representing the largest cut in over 40 years (Sibieta, 2020). It has been found that schools have responded to these financial pressures by reducing staffing and limiting additional provision for pupils. A report by Ofsted (2020) found that although funding did not have an overall impact on attainment, there was a significant impact on SEN provision, curriculum breadth, education quality and teacher workload. This demonstrates that schools and teachers have been forced to decide how to invest their limited resources, whilst attempting to continue maximising their data output, as decreed by policy. Teachers are therefore obligated to consider this when thinking about investing resources, "*looking at these sorts of things down the line and just thinking-,*[…] *-'do we want to hedge our bets on this kid?'*" (Participant 4, lines 162-164).

5.1.1.4. The exchange-value of low-attaining pupils

The ruling-classes dictate that the 'value' of pupils is solely measured academically, ignoring all other abilities. Accordingly, under the current accountability system, low-attaining pupils have little exchange-value as they do not produce the required data schools need to succeed in the market. The focus group participants revealed their internalised view through the discourse 'low-attaining pupils lack the ability to achieve'. They considered these pupils as being intrinsically deficient in 'ability' describing them as *"low-ability"* (Participant 1, lines 222 and 277; Participant 6, line 276; Participant 3, line 495). Low-ability pupils were defined as *"children who weren't as academic"* (Participant 3, lines 233-234), indicating that other skills and abilities are not taken into account when judging pupils' capabilities. Pupils who have above average creative talent or emotional intelligence are not revered, as these abilities are not valued by the education system. In other words, their use-value is ignored due to the focus on their exchange-value, which has been artificially reduced through uneven valuing of certain forms of learning. Even if pupils achieve high grades in creative subjects, these are less prized as the league tables focus on 'academic' subjects which hold more weight: *"we don't need to talk about them, they don't count towards the Ebacc* [which is based on 'academic' subjects]*"* (Participant 1, line 248).

Marx described labourers as only having value so long as their labour increases capital. Pupils only have value as individuals so long as they are able to produce the grades required by schools, as set out by the accountability measures, otherwise they are merely an encumbrance: *"they were saying, 'He's really nice.' And he comes in and I'm, like, 'Ugh. You are not nice, and you're really not quite all there.' So, it's very frustrating. And then that's a burden on me"* (Participant 5, lines 548-550).

As low-attaining pupils are viewed as holding little exchange-value, they are not considered worthy of investment. This is because investment will result in low returns as they are unlikely to achieve the grades required to be of value to the school. A discourse emerged of 'low-attaining pupils are sacrificed', where participants described how resources are diverted away from this group and allocated to those seen as better investments. Teachers "*pick people out and say, 'No chance.'*" (Participant 4, line 132), with schools allotting less qualified and less experienced teachers to low-attaining sets because they can "*dispose of these periods*" (Participant 5, line 293). It appears that schools with limited resources consider that it is only worth investing in pupils if they will guarantee a return:

> Participant 1: *[…] I also, if you look at teaching of low-ability-, low-attaining, it sometimes doesn't get the attention that it needs. So, there's-, and I think comes from that feeling of, like, 'I'm not sure these students are going to get it so-,'*
>
> Participant 5: *Less planning goes into it, less thought and consideration.*
>
> (Lines 277-280).

The need for schools to maximise their profit in the form of achieving high grades has led to pupils being traded and exchanged as commodities. This was illustrated by the depiction of the annual INSET day for Year 11 pupils as "*horse-trading – are they going to pass, yes or no?*" (Participant 5, line 139). Individual teachers also try to 'off-load' low-attaining pupils to maximise their own personal gain "*someone keeps trying to put kids in my class* (laughter)*. Like, someone keeps trying to move kids down from four into five*" (Participant 5, lines 540-541).

5.1.2. Cognitive dissonance

Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance proposes that pairs of cognitions can either be relevant or irrelevant to each other. If two cognitions are opposite to each other, they are dissonant. Dissonance is psychologically uncomfortable, which impels the individual to reduce the dissonance. The greater the magnitude of dissonance, the greater the pressure to reduce it. In addition to attempting to reduce the dissonance, individuals will also actively avoid situations and information that are likely to increase it.

The focus group participants displayed dissonance in terms of their beliefs and values around teaching and the way accountability measures influences teaching practice. They showed evidence of employing ways of reducing this dissonance by internalising the views and principles governing the education policy, altering their environment, and avoiding further dissonance through averting the vocalisation of uncomfortable practices ('what is not being said?').

5.1.2.1. Forced compliance and conflicting principles

One of the circumstances in which people will behave in a manner counter to their values is through forced compliance (Festinger, 1957). This occurs when a reward is offered for compliance, or when some punishment is threatened for failure to comply.

Accountability measures dictate that schools focus on achieving academic success. There are rewards for schools that meet the required academic standards and punishment for those that fail. Schools that meet these standards are presented as more attractive to parents who choose these schools for their children. Schools are funded according to

number of pupils enrolled, which means that schools are financially incentivised to maintain

high accountability standards. Conversely, schools that do not meet the accountability

standards secure less enrolment and suffer financial challenges (Stevenson, 2011). Schools

also risk a forced takeover by an academy, if judged inadequate by Ofsted (Roberts, 2019).

These potential rewards and risks were apparent to the participants:

> *Participant 6: And also, like, schools are like a marketplace, aren't they, so it's, like, you know, if you're higher, then more kids will want to go, you can stay open, like, kids-, schools close, don't they, because they're not-, so, it's, like, it's, kind of, there's, like, a marketplace with different schools-,*
>
> *Lines 253-256*

There are also personal rewards and punishments in relation to performance management

and performance-related pay. Pay progression for teachers is often reliant on meeting data

targets:

> *Participant 2: It's always your first target, isn't it?*
> *Participant 4: Yeah, so if you didn't hit it-,*
> *Participant 2: Or you can give them a legitimate reason why you haven't hit it.*
> *Participant 4: It's, it's the most important thing isn't it, definitely, and everything else comes second, which, I guess, says a lot about… your role as a teacher-,*
> *Participant 1: Yeah.*
> *Participant 4: -that you have to hit that, that data point before anything else.*
>
> *Lines 113-119*

Educational policy and standards are determined by the values of the sitting government.

Since the 1988 Education Reform Act, education policy has been influenced by neoliberal

values, which emphasise individual responsibility and self-interest at the forefront

(Stevenson, 2011; Williams, 2017). This resulted in the introduction of accountability

measures and the 'education market'. In contrast, research suggests that the majority of

teachers enter the profession because of their love for children, wanting to make a difference, and a love of their chosen subject (Jarvis & Woodrow, 2005; Kyriacou et al., 2003; Moss & Ehmke, 2020). These values were also the basis of the DfE's £37million 'Get Into Teaching' marketing campaign, with the tagline 'every lesson shapes a life' (Carr, 2020). These principles held by teachers, conflict with the neoliberal focus on academic achievement, positioning the acquisition of information and knowledge above all other areas of child development (Ball, 2008) and what former Education Secretary, Michael Gove, described as 'rigour' (DfE, 2014).

The participants described their dissonance as a 'battle', explaining that they are not able to spend time on what "*I'm morally guided to*", instead spending time on what "*up above, even on-, even outside of this school tell me I have to be guided to*" (Participant 1, lines 559-561), illustrating that the education policy does not align with teachers' personal values.

Participants conveyed the difficulty of prioritising academic attainment over social and emotional development, "*they've learnt how to communicate better with somebody* […] *but nobody marks them for that*" (Participant 2, lines 66-70), and prioritising attainment over pupil well-being:

> *Participant 1: […] so I remember a kid last year who loved business. He adored the lessons, he loved the teacher, and he could come away and have all sorts of chats. When it came to horse-trading, which is a horrible phrase, he-, they decided he was going to drop business because he wasn't going to get the 4, and this kid who, it was, like, his release of the week to just go and sit and talk about business.*
>
> *Lines 144-148*

The participants were mindful that low-attaining pupils are disproportionately affected by accountability measures and "*suffer from this model*" (Participant 6, line 97), and the teaching they receive "*doesn't get the attention that it needs"* (Participant 1, line 278) because "*it's deemed-, yeah, I don't know. It's not easier, is it, but less important"* (Participant 4, line 288) although "*it's not though, it's more I think, far more. Far more."* (Participant 2, line 296). This once again shows the contradiction between their values and practice, which Participant 3 described as a 'struggle':

> Participant 3: *I struggle with that because I know how much I should be doing for my low sets, because I teach bottom set 8 and bottom set 7, and I know how much planning it requires yet do not have the capacity to do it. And my capacity is put into A level because if I didn't meet those Alps3 targets, which is on my performance management-,*
>
> *Lines 297-300*

This demonstrates that the participants recognise their pupils' use-value, but the system in which they operate forces them to focus on their exchange-value, by use of rewards and sanctions. This creates cognitive dissonance between their personal principles and the way they are required to practice teaching: *"I've had kids break down in tears… because of this,… and you don't go, 'How are you?' you go, 'Why haven't you started that with a quote?'"* (Participant 6, lines 530-531).

5.1.2.2. Reducing dissonance: adding new cognitive elements

Festinger (1957) suggested that one way of reducing cognitive dissonance is by adding new cognitive elements which are consonant to the behaviour exhibited due to forced compliance. In the case of the participants, despite outwardly expressing their disagreement

with current educational policies and practices, they also showed evidence of internalising the values of the ruling-class that underpin these policies, such as neoliberalism and emphasis on academic success.

Participants showed evidence of holding higher regard for academic work, suggesting that the work produced by low-attaining pupils lacked value. For example, they dismissed coursework, (which low-attaining pupils are typically more successful in than exams), as a *"little portfolio of proud things"* (Participant 6, line 320). There was also an acknowledgement that *"what we're constantly working towards is the exam at the end, right?"* (Participant 1, lines 54-55) and that these exams are the fundamental goal of secondary schools:

> *Participant 1:* […] *everything is assessed at the end of two or three years of work, and then you've got some students who get to the end of that with no GCSEs. It's, like, 'Well, what was the point of 8, 9 and 11 if all they've been working towards is this that makes them feel like absolute duds?'*
>
> Lines 334-337

There was also evidence of participants internalising the principles of individual responsibility and self-interest that characterises neoliberalism, with a suggestion that pupils should be doing work alone:

> *Participant 2:* Yeah. And you have to write, like, stuff all over their books saying, you know, 'work together as a class', or 'group work' or something, so if anybody reads it, they'll look at it and, 'Wow, that's amazing,' but no (laughter). *They didn't do it themselves*
>
> Lines 523-525

This relates to the concept of ability, with views that some pupils are simply not able to succeed: *"you almost pick people out and say, 'No chance.'"* (Participant 4, line 132). It can

be argued that the neoliberal doctrine of self-interest bolsters a culture that is willing to

sacrifice certain groups to ensure the best outcomes for schools and teachers. Pupils

perceived as 'low-ability' are best placed for this sacrifice as they are considered unlikely to

raise their attainment, regardless of any attempted interventions: "*kids who've had years

and years of intervention, and things haven't improved*" (Participant 1, line 434). By

reasoning that these pupils are innately incapable of achieving the required standards, they

are able to resolve their cognitive dissonance.

Participants also internalised the principle that accountability measures are essential for

ensuring pupils are not disadvantaged:

> Participant 6: *But I'm not saying there shouldn't be accountability, because
> there should, like, 'cause kids can get a really bad deal if there is
> no accountability, like, there needs to be accountability.*
> Participant 1: *True.*
> Participant 6: *But I think there are, like, particularly low-attaining that suffer
> from this model.*

Lines 93-97

Although there was acknowledgement that accountability measures handicap low-attaining

pupils, Participant 6 still expressed a belief that they were essential to ensure pupils receive

a good standard of education. Accepting this cognitive element facilitates the capacity to

work under an educational system that causes 'suffering' to some pupils, by accepting that

it benefits the majority.

The internalisation of these values was underpinned by a belief that, as teachers, they were

'disempowered' and unable to enact change. When discussing alternative approaches and

systems, participants added a caveat, such as "*that's not possible*" (Participant 1, line 174).

Participants also identified pressures that hinder their ability to help low-attaining pupils,

such as lack of *"capacity"* (Participant 3, line 299) and *"time"* (Participant 1, line 553). By reasoning that they are unable to change the education system or teaching practices, participants are able to reduce their dissonance by believing there are no alternatives.

5.1.2.3. Reducing dissonance: changing environmental elements

Another means of reducing dissonance is through environmental change (Festinger, 1957). This refers to changing elements of the environment in which the dissonant element occurs.

Teachers are forced to comply with educational policies contrary to their teaching values, causing cognitive dissonance. They are unable to change these policies and related pressures, but they can change their environment by removing low-attaining pupils from their class. Participants described how *"someone keeps trying to put kids in my class"* (Participant 5, line 540) which was retorted with *"I don't know* (laughter), *I think he's better off staying where he is"* (Participant 4, lines 545-546) and *"playing that game"* (Participant 4, line 547). By excluding low-attaining pupils, teachers no longer have to witness the 'suffering' that their pupils endure due to the accountability measures or have to make difficult decision to divert resources away from them.

Participants also provided examples of how they controlled which subjects low-attaining pupils studied, rather than pupils choosing the subjects they were interested in:

> *Participant 4: That decision's made quite early isn't it, Year 8 options?*
> *Participant 1: Very.*
> *Participant 4: Those kids that, say, 'I want to do history'-,*
> *Participant 2: They can't.*
> *Participant 4: -are we saying, 'I don't think you're suited to it,' which is quite early to make the decision.*

There was also talk about removing pupils from subjects they enjoy *"they decided he was going to drop business because he wasn't going to get the 4, and this kid who, it was, like, his release of the week to just go and sit and talk about business"* (Participant 1, lines 146-148) or potentially from the school altogether *"everyone's saying, 'No, chuck him out.'"* (Participant 5, line 150). These are examples of ways in which teachers could be changing their environment to try to remove the cause of their dissonance.

5.1.2.4. Avoidance

Festinger described strong and important tendencies to avoid increases of dissonance, especially where it has been necessary to introduce new cognitive elements. The seeking of new information is done in a highly selective manner, so as to not create any more dissonance. Individuals ignore and avoid information that may increase their dissonance, concentrating on information that reduces it.

The participants showed evidence of using avoidance in their discourses to circumvent increasing their level of dissonance. By using a passive voice and avoiding pronouns, they were able to evade confronting some of the practices that do not conform to their values. For example, they spoke about the way low-attaining pupils *"get forgotten a lot"* (Participant 6, line 50) and how *"They're, sort of,… not necessarily tossed aside"* (Participant 2, line 35), without specifically acknowledging who was 'forgetting' or 'tossing aside' those pupils. By speaking in a passive voice, they are able to conceal their complicity with the system and thus minimise the conflict with their personal values.

Participants also seemed to avoid consciously thinking about some of the practices which conflict with their values, by not articulating them out loud. They often trailed off at the ends of their sentences, such as in the following exchange:

> *Participant 4:* *And I know it's bad, but you almost pick people out and say, 'No chance.'*
> *Participant 6:* *Mmm.*
> *Participant 1:* *Yeah.*
> *Participant 4:* *And then you're thinking ahead to whenever and just, you know. So-, which isn't fair on the student-,*
> *Participant 1:* *No.*
> *Participant 4:* *Because it's not, you know-,*
>
> *Lines 132-138*

5.1.2.5. Self-affirmation and cognitive dissonance

According to self-affirmation theory, thought and action are guided by a strong motivation to maintain an overall self-image of moral and adaptive adequacy (Aronson et al., 1999). To summarise the theory: we want to see ourselves as good, capable and able to predict and control outcomes in areas that matter. Awareness of information that threatens this self-concept motivates us to restore it to a state of integrity.

In a forced-compliance paradigm, it is easier to reduce dissonance with high self-esteem, as it is possible to draw on internal resources and more favourable self-concepts to affirm away the threat. Low self-esteem individuals are more likely instead to rationalise and adopt principles to reduce their dissonance (Aronson et al., 1999).

The findings suggest that the participants held a low view of themselves as teachers. This is reflected in their expressions of their self-worth in relation to their performance in achieving the required standards required by the accountability measures: 'I am only as

good as my pupils' results'. The participants described feeling like *"awful teachers"* (Participant 6, line 536) and *"feel*[ing] *like you're failing these kids, you feel like you're failing the department"* (Participant 6, line 566). The strength of these feelings was unexpected, considering the school has historically performed well on these measures.

It is evident that accountability measures can reduce teachers' self-esteem in relation to their professional capacity. This then creates a need for them to adopt strategies to reduce the cognitive dissonance caused by accountability measures. As a result, these pressures create an environment in which teachers feel ill-equipped to challenge unethical structures. They are therefore compelled to implement new cognitive elements, adapt their environment and undergo avoidance to preserve a favourable self-concept.

5.2. Summary of findings

There is significant alignment between the research findings and those of the literature review. This study has contextualised the findings to propose a model that can explain how discourses in education originate and filter down through the power hierarchy.

The findings of this study suggest that teachers' discourses are rooted in the neoliberal ideologies determined by government policy. It highlighted that due to the government's invested interest in self-validation and the knowledge economy, 'data', as measured by academic examinations, has become the currency of the education market. As a result, schools' main goals are to deliver good exam data, which the literature review's findings suggested have a negative effect on pupil learning (Coldwell & Willis, 2017; Collins et al.,

2010; Dymoke, 2012; Forrester, 2005; Gibbons, 2019; Lambirth et al., 2012; Lumb, 2014;

Winter, 2017) as well as their wellbeing (Chapman, 2002; Forrester, 2005; Taber et al, 2011;

Troman et al, 2007; Winter, 2017).

Pupils can be seen to have become commoditised as producers of this data. Rather than

children being considered for their unique strengths and contributions, it is suggested that

they are evaluated by a singular measure: their ability to perform in academic exams. This

was demonstrated in the literature review's finding of a fixation on 'performativity'

(Bradbury, 2011; Rustique-Forrester, 2005).

Participants' discourses were dominated by the view that low-attaining pupils and their

work deliver little value, and that their failure to perform well in exams is due to an innate

inability to achieve. This was also highlighted in the literature review, which suggested that

teachers believed in a 'deficit' model of low-attainment, where pupil traits were the cause

of their low-attainment (Mazenod et al., 2018, Thompson et al., 2016; Walters, 2017). This

perception could cause teachers to conclude that it is not worth investing time and

resources on pupils that are regarded as low-attaining. Therefore, it is proposed that low-

attaining pupils are sacrificed and instead, resources are invested in pupils deemed able to

generate good exam results that maximise the school's 'data'.

Participants were consciously aware of the issues associated with the current system of

accountability, describing having a 'battle' between their values and the demands of the

profession. The literature review findings also highlighted this, with suggestions that

accountability measures provide an inaccurate and narrow assessment of schools (Coldwell

& Willis, 2017; Collins et al., 2010; Dymoke, 2012; Forrester, 2005; Guimaraes, 2016;

Kendall, 2019; Troman et al., 2007; Winter, 2017).

Both the present study and the literature review, found that teachers submitted to practices

that contradicted their values, demonstrating cognitive dissonance (Chapman, 2002; Elton &

Male, 2015; Forrester, 2005; Gibbons, 2019; Guimaraes, 2016; Lumb, 2014; Nicholl &

McLellan, 2008; Taber et al, 2011; Troman et al, 2007; Williams, 2017). Teachers are

required to navigate this dissonance whilst managing the damage to their self-worth that

accountability measures bring. The literature review found that teachers are overwhelmed

with the pressures and stress of the job, which diminishes their wellbeing (Chapman, 2002;

Elton & Male, 2015; Forrester, 2005; Kendall, 2019; Winter, 2017). To cope with this, they

succumb to the view that low-attaining pupils are a challenge to teachers' self-identity and

competence (Kelly et al., 2013; Mazenod et al., 2018; Walters, 2017). This was paralleled in

the present study, expressed by the dominant discourse: 'I am only as good as my pupils'

results'.

Teachers can be seen to be required to navigate the conflict between cognitive dissonance

and their self-esteem. This study proposes that they do this by internalising neoliberal

principles, including that accountability measures are essential to maintain standards, a

sentiment also echoed in the literature review findings (Chapman, 2002; Coldwell & Willis,

2017; Forrester, 2005; Plowright, 2007; Troman et al., 2007). Participants also appeared to

internalise the idea that they lack power to enact change. Practices of 'trading' pupils by

controlling the subjects they can take or moving them to an alternative set or class, allows

the teachers to alter their environment and lessen the cause of their dissonance. Another

coping mechanism participants appeared to use, was to avoid confronting some of the teaching practices that conflict with their values. This can be seen to generate discourses that ultimately upholds the power structures that support a neoliberal education system.

5.3. Implications of the research findings

The findings of this study highlight a potential fundamental flaw in the neoliberal ideology that underpins English education policy. Rather than the competitive market increasing educational standards for all pupils, it can be seen to have created a system that places differing levels of value on children, depending on the exam data they are able to produce. There is evidence to suggest that this emphasis on exam results has led to schools having little incentive to prioritise resources for low-attaining pupils, regarding them as a burden and threat to their success. These policies arguably contribute to the widening inequalities and inequities between the most and least advantaged children in society. Pupils judged as low-attaining comprise a major demographic of EP work. The findings of this research suggest that EPs are attempting to support and advocate for these pupils in a system that is structurally incentivised to neglect them.

The findings from this study and the literature review propose that ultimately, the fundamental principles of education in England require reform to achieve equity for all pupils. The current government policies, rooted in neoliberal capitalist doctrines, are fixated on competition as measured through the quantification of pupil outputs (Williams, 2017). The very concept of competition means that there will always be 'losers' and therefore the inequalities and inequities in society are maintained and exacerbated.

Disappointingly, a change in ideology is highly unlikely considering the current national and global context. The changes to GCSE and A-Level exams during the global pandemic of 2020 provided an opportunity to consider and review the role of high-stakes testing in English education. National exams were cancelled, and grades awarded through teacher assessments. The percentage of candidates receiving a 'good pass' (grade 5 or above) rose from 50.6% in 2019 to 58.2% in 2020 (Ofqual, 2020). The subsequent reaction to the use of teacher assessments and the higher pass rates showed that there is little appetite for major reform. There were concerns around 'grade inflation' (Baird, 2020), with the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson warning that the high grades would "devalue the results for the class of 2020" which "would mean that students this year would lose out twice over, both in their education and their future prospects" (Williamson, 2020). This view reflects the principles of the competitive, neoliberal educational system that exam grades are comparative value judgements. A pass mark is only valuable in comparison to a fail mark. If too many people pass, the pass no longer has value. Therefore, the system requires a certain number of pupils to 'fail' and yet schools are judged as inadequate if they have failing pupils, which is a baffling paradox. The persistence of this underlying belief-system means low-attaining pupils will continue to be regarded as a burden to schools, and not worth investing resources in.

Although ideological reform is unlikely, there is potential for the government to consider policy change that could benefit both low-attaining pupils and capitalist goals. The English economy is not exclusively reliant on knowledge, but also skills. This was demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic when many low-paid workers were designated as "key

workers", despite their seemingly low standing in society when measured solely on 'exchange-value' (Farquharson et al., 2020). It makes economic sense in a capitalist system to ensure children are developing skills as well as knowledge. Reforming accountability measures so that academic attainment is not the sole gauge of success could ensure all children are provided with the skills and learning to grow as individuals and progress to take up a range of occupations.

Given that educational policy will not change in the near future, EPs should consider how they can better support schools and teachers to develop pupils' abilities and aptitudes to enable them to fulfil their potential, rather than solely fixate on academic success. Thoughtful consideration needs to be given as to how this can be achieved within a system that encourages the opposite. At an EP level, understanding the influences of educational policy on teachers' discourses has significant implications on practice at the individual, group and organisational level.

5.3.1. Implications for EP practice at an individual level: working with dissonant teachers

The findings highlighted that teachers are working within a highly pressured system of accountability, that promotes academic progress and success above all else. This creates cognitive dissonance in teachers, who value nurturing child development but are forced to direct their energy and time to academic attainment. Teachers' time and energy are finite, which is why schools decree that they focus on pupils who are most likely to achieve exam success and maximise the school's data output. One way teachers reduce the dissonance generated by these practices is by internalising a fixed idea of 'ability', reasoning that low-

attaining pupils have an 'achievement ceiling', regardless of extra support that may be provided.

EPs attempt to work with teachers to guide them away from this within-child view of ability and achievement, with the British Psychological Society (BPS) competencies citing the need for integrated formulations that include systemic and ecological frameworks (BPS, 2017). EPs work with teachers to negotiate changes in classroom practices to support young peoples' learning. The findings of this study can be interpreted to suggest that in trying to do this, EPs could actually increase the dissonance teachers feel, through challenging their internalised beliefs of pupils lacking ability, and therefore challenging their self-concept as a teacher. This could impact teachers' wellbeing in an already demanding role, and potentially further motivate teachers to reduce their dissonance by resisting change.

EPs therefore need to understand the pressures and expectations that teachers face under the current educational policies. In doing so, EPs will be more equipped to navigate consultations with teachers in a way that ensures support for young people, whilst helping maintain teachers' sense of self and competency. EPs can discuss with teachers how they cope with the pressures of accountability measures and how this affects them and their practice, and engage in supervisory, reflective conversations to support them.

EPs should also keep these pressures in mind when recommending support for pupils. Particularly, emphasis on whole-class strategies might be more manageable for teachers to implement and provide support for the learning of individuals with SEN as well as the whole class, which can help to meet accountability goals.

5.3.2. Implications for EP practice at a group level: the discourses held within schools

This research has highlighted the benefits of using discourse analysis to deepen the understanding of the current education environment. By becoming aware of the dominant discourses in the schools they work in, EPs can consider how pupils are conceptualised and discussed by staff. This can inform hypotheses at an individual level, but also about the wider influences on, and values held by the school.

Through identifying and exploring the discourses within a school, EPs could potentially highlight areas for staff training and tailor this to fit the culture of the school. This could be invaluable to help teachers consider values and practices around inclusion.

It may be beneficial for EPs to provide teachers with opportunities to reflect on their practice as a group. Work discussion groups (Jackson, 2008) for example, could offer teachers a space to explore the various factors that influence their work and how these may manifest in their teaching practice. EPs can skilfully facilitate these sessions to enable teachers to become consciously aware of these influences, without leading to feelings of guilt or blame.

5.3.3. Implications for EP practice at an organisational level: politics in Educational Psychology

Much of the research within educational psychology attempts to exist within a political vacuum, leading to calls for practitioners to think more critically about the impact of society, power and politics (Williams et al., 2017). Indeed, local authority codes of conduct enforce

"political neutrality". This research argues that the interconnected nature of politics and education are inescapable. Regardless of whether there is agreement with the political interpretation, this research highlights that politics directly influences everyone working in schools. As a result, EPs need to think critically about policy and power, and consider how these impact on the children and young people we support.

This research has important implications for EPs, as it suggests that the work of EPs directly conflicts with current educational policy objectives. Educational psychology values, such as inclusion and equity, are not congruent with neoliberal values of self-interest, competition and meritocracy. It is therefore imperative for EPs to understand, discuss and critique the political context they are working in, rather than avoid it. It may also be appropriate for the professional bodies representing EPs to consider taking a more proactive stance and contribute to the agenda and development of educational policy.

5.4. Limitations

These findings are not intended to be generalised to all teachers working in English secondary schools, although transferability can be considered. The relativist and social constructionist orientation of this research means it was designed to deliver one interpretation of the experiences of the participants in this study, rather than attempt to find the 'truth'. The findings represent the interpretation of the author, which is possibly different to that of other researchers. Appropriate steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness in the analysis of this study (see section 3.11.). Therefore, when considering

the limitations of this research, focus has been placed upon the experience of the

participants, and the implications of the context.

5.4.1. Ethics

Consideration was given to protection of participants when designing the procedure. As the

researcher, I was aware that the discussion might lead to sensitive topics and may cause

emotional distress, as discourses are unconstrained. However, I did not anticipate the

uncomfortable themes that arose through the discussion and my analysis. Due to this, I gave

careful consideration as to whether I should include quotes, as I have a duty of care to the

participants. In discussion with my supervisor, it was decided that the anonymisation was

sufficient to protect the participants as individuals. The nature of the participants'

contributions was not coerced or encouraged; my involvement as the researcher during the

focus group discussion was minimal. I ensured that I presented the topics for discussion in a

neutral tone and maintained distance from the group to make sure that I did not

unconsciously prompt or influence the discourse. Participants were also given the option, at

the end of the focus group discussion to withdraw their contributions from being quoted

verbatim, which they all declined.

Participants consented to contribute willingly and freely to the focus group,

and were informed that the discussion would be analysed using a Marxist lens. However,

they were not in a position to anticipate how the discussion would evolve or the themes

that would arise from analysis. Due to the nature of the themes, I was concerned that the

participants may be distressed to learn of the interpretation. After the focus group, the

participants were asked whether they would be interested in learning about the findings

from this study, and all declined. This was discussed extensively in supervision and it was

decided that it would be more ethical to provide them with a brief summary of the findings

so that they have the opportunity to contact me. I therefore composed a pamphlet with a

brief summary of the findings, which I asked the SENCO to disseminate to the participants

(see Appendix S).

5.4.2. Interpretation of context

The second level of analysis in Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional framework is

'interpretation' (see section 3.9.1.2.). Correspondingly, this level explores the relationship

between the text and the interaction. Analysis of the context level raised some limitations

with the way the focus group was set-up and enacted. Four elements were considered, as

suggested by Fairclough: content, subject, relations and connections.

5.4.2.1. Content: what is going on in relation to activity, topic and purpose?

Although it is not unusual for teachers to have discussions with each other about their

pupils and accountability measures, it is possible that the discussion in the focus group was

constrained. Participants may have found it difficult to speak freely due to the structured

conditions of the focus group, as well as the fact that the discussion was audio-recorded.

The visual prompt sheet to introduce the topic (see figure 2) appeared to restrict the

language that the participants used. For example, on several occasions the participants

referred to "*low-ability*" and then 'corrected' their language to "*low-attaining*" as written on

the sheet. This demonstrates that the structured use of specific vocabulary, influenced the

discussion.

Participants may have also formed an idea of what I, as the researcher, expected from them, and this may have influenced their conduct. In addition, given that the SENCO, who also took part, helped recruit them, they may have felt under pressure to please both myself, as the researcher, and the SENCO as a colleague, either consciously or unconsciously.

5.4.2.2. Subjects: who is involved, and which subject positions are set up?

The participants involved were all colleagues and, potentially, friends. Moreover, given that the SENCO recruited the participants on my behalf, it is possible that she approached colleagues with whom she got on well with, and whose values aligned with her own.

As focus group members, the participants are placed in a one-down position with regard to power, which could influence their contributions. They were also conscious of the fact that the discussion would be analysed and evaluated, so may not have responded to the same degree as they would if having a 'natural' conversation.

5.4.2.3. Relations: how were power, social distance etc set up and enacted in the situation?

A noticeable power differential was evident with regard to the SENCO and the other participants. It is possible that the presence of the SENCO may have affected the interaction of the group, the content and direction of the discussion. Given the power differential between the SENCO and the other participants, they may have consciously or unconsciously not voiced their opinions freely.

The nature of the discussion that arose from the focus group would suggest that the SENCO's presence was not a considerable factor which may have undermined the findings. Participants were seemingly candid when talking about unethical practices and openly disagreed with each other at times, including with the SENCO.

5.4.2.4. Connections: the role of language and how was it used?

Participants were aware that the conversation was being recorded for research and this knowledge may have affected the language used. Participants may have not talked as freely as they might do otherwise.

5.5. Dissemination strategy

A brief overview of the findings was emailed to the SENCO of the participating school, who was asked to disseminate it to the rest of the participants (see Appendix S).

The findings will be shared at a local level with the Educational Psychology Service in which the research was conducted, as part of a Team Development Day. A presentation of findings will also be delivered to the students and staff of the Educational Psychology Department at the Tavistock and Portman. Sharing the findings will allow for reflexive dialogue regarding the implications for EP practice and how the research findings may be publicised more widely.

Sharing the findings at a national level will require careful consideration due to the ideological nature of this research. Submission for publication in a peer-reviewed journal will be explored, but a broader audience may be more appropriate. As such, alternative means of dissemination will be considered such as presenting at conferences, writing opinion pieces for print media, online educational forums and/or a book. It is hoped that when sharing the findings at a local level with my colleagues, discussions can be generated on how the information could be targeted to the relevant audiences (e.g. teachers), with the aim of generating implications that are valuable to them.

5.6. Suggestions for further research

A number of future studies on the current topic are recommended.

To develop a fuller view of how teachers value pupils depending on the exam data they are able to produce, further investigation is warranted to consider whether the discourses of teachers of non-exam years and in primary schools reflect those of Year 11 teachers.

There is also scope to extend Rustique-Forrester's (2005) work on exclusions by investigating the notion of pupils' exchange value. Prior to exclusion, schools often explore the use of a 'managed move'. This notion of 'trading pupils' may also be linked to the commoditisation of pupils.

Cognitive dissonance may be contributing to teachers leaving the profession. It would be interesting to investigate if the reasons for leaving the profession relate to the strategy of

'changing environmental elements' to manage the cognitive dissonance initiated by accountability measures.

It would also be beneficial for future research to be conducted to consider strategies that EPs can use during consultation to help teachers navigate cognitive dissonance.

5.7. Conclusion

This research sought to explore GCSE teachers' discourses around accountability measures and low-attaining pupils, and how these discourses uphold and/or challenge the structures in place that enable the system. The findings of this study align with the results of the research reviewed in the literature, but proposes a new framework to explain the emergence of these themes in education.

Through taking a Critical Discourse Analysis with a Marxist lens approach, it can be argued that the marketisation of schools leads to pupils being seen as commodities that produce exam data as currency. This can put pressure on teachers to place differing levels of value on pupils, depending on the exam data they are able to produce. Significantly, this can result in teachers internalising the neoliberal values that regard low-attaining pupils as having low value, and not worthy of investment. Fundamentally, this view of pupils contradicts most teachers' value systems, potentially creating cognitive dissonance, which they have to mediate to continue working in the current education environment. This dissonance has been shown to make teachers adopt behaviours and attitudes that help relieve the discomfort initiated by the conflict. This includes adjusting their environment by

placing pupils judged as 'low-attaining' in lower learning sets; controlling which subjects

pupils can take; convincing themselves that they lack power to enact change; and

consciously avoiding confronting the role they play in uncomfortable teaching practices that

conflict with their values. This motivation to mediate dissonance and retain a positive self-

concept ultimately means that teachers can end up unintentionally upholding the

educational structures that they consciously oppose.

This research has highlighted the prominence of politics in education, including the work of

EPs. Educational policies do not always protect the interests of vulnerable children, and

often do not align with the Educational Psychology values of inclusion and equity. These

findings suggest that it is fundamental for EPs to consider the political field in which they

work and use this understanding to support schools and teachers to promote practices that

enable vulnerable pupils to achieve their full potential.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Overview of the English National testing programme and accountability system.

High-stakes testing

English school children aged 7-16 are tested at specific stages of their education. Table 10 summarises these tests, as outlined in the national curriculum (Department for Education [DfE], 2014a).

Table 10
Overview of national testing in England

Stage	Test
Year 1	Phonics screening check
Key Stage 1	National tests and teacher assessments in: • English reading • English grammar, punctuation and spelling • Maths
End of Key Stage 2	National tests in: • English reading • English grammar, punctuation and spelling • Maths
End of Key Stage 4	General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs) via national testing
End of Key Stage 5	Advanced Level qualifications (A-Levels) via national testing

The national tests taken at key stages 2, 4 and 5 can be considered 'high-stakes' as they act as a gateway, determining vital outcomes for pupils, teachers and schools (Stevenson & Wood, 2013; West, 2010).

For secondary schools, GCSEs are used as the main indicator of performance. Over the last decade GCSEs have been reformed to become more 'rigorous', with more 'challenging', 'knowledge-based' content. In 2010 the structure changed from a modular-based assessment process (which allowed exam to be taken over time and gave pupils the opportunity to retake exams) to a linear assessment, with exams being taken only at the end of the course. In 2017 the grading system was also changed from the traditional A*-G to a numbers system (9-1) to create a wider variation of grades, particularly at the top (A* has changed to 8 or 9) and at the pass mark (C has changed to 4 or 5; Ofqual, 2019).

GCSE results are used to inform Ofsted inspections and determine league table positioning (West, 2010). Teachers of GCSE classes often have performance management targets set which use this data (Stevenson & Wood, 2013). Children who do not achieve the required standard for GCSEs have multiple future options closed to them including apprenticeships, technical courses and various jobs (Children's Commissioner, 2019).

League tables

League tables were first published by the Conservative Government in 1992, to hold schools accountable for their national test results (DfE, 1992). Positioning on league tables were calculated by the percentage of pupils achieving five or more 'good' GCSE passes (grades

A*-C; Leckie & Goldstein, 2016). Grade C became an important threshold at GCSE, putting

pressure on teachers to ensure as many children as possible achieved this grade (Taylor,

2016). In 2016 new secondary school accountability measures were introduced, with some

subsequent modifications arising from the reform of GCSEs in 2017 (DfE, 2016). A full list of

the league table measures used at time of writing can be found in table 11.

Table 11

Overview of league table measures

Measure	Description
Progress 8	Progress across 8 qualifications
Attainment 8	Attainment across the same 8 qualifications
EBacc APS	English Baccalaureate average point score
EBacc Entry	Percentage of pupils entering the English Baccalaureate
Attainment in English and maths	Percentage of pupils achieving a grade 5 or above in English and maths
Pupil destination	Percentage of pupils staying in education or going into employment after key stage 4

Progress 8 was introduced in 2016 (DfE, 2020a) as a way of stopping the penalisation of

schools with a low-attaining intake (Gill, 2018). Pupils' KS2 results are compared to their end

of KS4 results. Their progress is then measured against the progress of other pupils

nationally with similar prior attainment. It is based on the grades pupils achieve across eight

main subjects. These are English and Maths, up to three subjects from the Ebacc list, and students' three highest scores from a range of other qualifications, including GCSEs and approved non-GCSEs. English and maths are given double weighting to reflect their importance. This is now the main measure used on secondary school league tables (DfE, 2020a).

The EBacc is a set of subjects which, according to DfE guidance, are 'essential' for pupils' future prospects in terms of study and career. These subjects are: English language and literature; maths; the sciences; geography or history; a language. To calculate the EBacc APS, the average point score of the 5 subject areas for all pupils are added together and divided by the number of pupils in the group (DfE, 2019b).

Ofsted

The 1992 Education (Schools) Act established a system of rigorous school inspection by Ofsted (DfE, 1992). Schools were initially subjected to week-long inspections every four years, receiving two months' notice (Ferguson et al., 2000). In 2005, this was changed to 2-3 day long inspections every three years, with schools receiving 2 days' notice. Ofsted provided assessment rated on a 4-point scale: 1 Outstanding, 2 Good, 3 Satisfactory and 4 Inadequate (Ofsted, 2006).

In the current system, introduced in 2012, schools are informed of an inspection the afternoon before it takes place. The 'Satisfactory' category changed to 'Requires Improvement'. Schools that are judged as 'Requires Improvement' are re-inspected within 12-18 months and are treated in the same way as if they were judged 'inadequate'. If the

school doesn't improve, they are put under 'special measures' which leads to forced takeover, with the school having to become an academy (Ofsted, 2013).

Outstanding schools are exempted from routine inspections, although they may be inspected if concerns are raised. 'Good' schools receive a 2-day inspection every four years. However, they may receive a 'short' 1-day inspection at any time, which does not lead to a 'formal designation'. Ofsted looks at available school data before an inspection (Ofsted, 2019). In January 2020, the Government launched a consultation on removing the exemption from inspection for mainstream schools judged outstanding (DfE, 2020c).

Performance management

In 2013 the government abolished automatic pay progression for all classroom teachers, and introduced Performance-Related Pay. Schools must annually consider whether or not to increase the salary of each individual teacher based on their performance (DfE, 2019c; Sharp et al, 2017). Schools can therefore withhold pay progression for teachers who are assessed through the appraisal system as underperforming.

Appendix B: Search result from Literature Review 1 before application of exclusion criteria

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Taber, K. S., Riga, F., Brindley, S., Winterbottom, M., Finney, J., & Fisher, L. G. (2011). Formative Conceptions of Assessment: Trainee Teachers' Thinking about Assessment Issues in English Secondary Schools. *Teacher Development*, *15*(2), 171–186.

Tedder, M., & Lawy, R. (2009). The Pursuit of "Excellence": Mentoring in Further Education Initial Teacher Training in England. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, *61*(4), 413–429.

Thompson, I. (2012). To Chunk or Not to Chunk? *Mathematics Teaching*, *227*, 45–48.

Troman, G., Jeffrey, B., & Raggl, A. (2007). Creativity and Performativity Policies in Primary School Cultures. *Journal of Education Policy*, *22*(5), 549–572.

Williams, G. (2017). The Language of Performativity? A Content Analysis Concerning Differing Constructions of Leadership for Secondary School PE Departments. *School Leadership & Management*, *37*(3), 311–329.

Wilson, A. (2010). Teachers' Conceptualisations of the Intuitive and the Intentional in Poetry Composition. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *9*(3), 53–74.

Winter, C. (2017). Curriculum Policy Reform in an Era of Technical Accountability: "Fixing" Curriculum, Teachers and Students in English Schools. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *49*(1), 55–74.

Wood, E. (2019). Unbalanced and Unbalancing Acts in the Early Years Foundation Stage: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Policy-Led Evidence on Teaching and Play from the Office for Standards in Education in England (Ofsted). *Education 3-13*, *47*(7), 784–795.

Appendix C: List of included papers for Literature Review 1

Chapman, C. (2002). Ofsted and School Improvement: Teachers' Perceptions of the Inspection Process in Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances. *School Leadership & Management*, *22*(3), 257–272.

Coldwell, M., & Willis, B. (2017). Tests as Boundary Signifiers: Level 6 Tests and the Primary Secondary Divide. *Curriculum Journal*, *28*(4), 578–597.

Collins, S., Reiss, M., & Stobart, G. (2010). What Happens when High-Stakes Testing Stops? Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Compulsory National Testing in Science of 11-Year-Olds in England and Its Abolition in Wales. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, *17*(3), 273–286.

Dymoke, S. (2012). Opportunities or Constraints? Where Is the Space for Culturally Responsive Poetry Teaching within High-Stakes Testing Regimes at 16+ in Aotearoa New Zealand and England? *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, *11*(4), 19–35.

Elton, J., & Male, T. (2015). The Impact on a Primary School Community in England of Failed Inspection and Subsequent Academisation. *School Leadership & Management*, *35*(4), 408–421.

Forrester, G. (2005). All in a Day's Work: Primary Teachers "Performing" and "Caring." *Gender and Education*, *17*(3), 271–287.

Gibbons, S. (2019). "Death by PEEL?" The Teaching of Writing in the Secondary English Classroom in England. *English in Education*, *53*(1), 36–45.

Guimaraes, S., Howe, S., Clausen, S. B., & Cottle, M. (2016). Assessment of What/For What? Teachers' and Head Teachers' Views on Using Well-Being and Involvement as a Screening Measure for Conducting Baseline Assessment on School Entry in English Primary Schools. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, *17*(2), 248–253.

Holmes, B. (2017). The Management of Teachers' Non-Directed Time in a Secondary School. *Management in Education*, *31*(1), 39–42.

Kendall, L. (2019). Supporting All Children to Reach Their Potential: Practitioner Perspectives on Creating an Inclusive School Environment. *Education 3-13*, *47*(6), 678–691.

Lambirth, A., Smith, S., & Steele, S. (2012). "Poetry Is Happening but I Don't Exactly Know How": Literacy Subject Leaders' Perceptions of Poetry in Their Primary Schools. *Literacy*, *46*(2), 73–80.

Lefstein, A. (2013). The Regulation of Teaching as Symbolic Politics: Rituals of Order, Blame and Redemption. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *34*(5), 643–659.

Lumb, A. (2014). Prioritizing Children's Spirituality in the Context of Church of England Schools: Understanding the Tensions. *Journal of Education & Christian Belief*, *18*(1), 41–59.

Nicholl, B., & McLellan, R. (2008). "We're All in This Game Whether We Like It or Not to Get a Number of As to Cs." Design and Technology Teachers' Struggles to Implement Creativity and Performativity Policies. *British Educational Research Journal*, *34*(5), 585–600.

O'Leary, M. (2013). Expansive and Restrictive Approaches to Professionalism in FE Colleges: The Observation of Teaching and Learning as a Case in Point. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, *18*(4), 348–364.

Plowright, D. (2007). Self-Evaluation and Ofsted Inspection: Developing an Integrative Model of School Improvement. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *35*(3), 373–393.

Taber, K. S., Riga, F., Brindley, S., Winterbottom, M., Finney, J., & Fisher, L. G. (2011). Formative Conceptions of Assessment: Trainee Teachers' Thinking about Assessment Issues in English Secondary Schools. *Teacher Development*, *15*(2), 171–186.

Troman, G., Jeffrey, B., & Raggl, A. (2007). Creativity and Performativity Policies in Primary School Cultures. *Journal of Education Policy*, *22*(5), 549–572.

Williams, G. (2017). The Language of Performativity? A Content Analysis Concerning Differing Constructions of Leadership for Secondary School PE Departments. *School Leadership & Management*, *37*(3), 311–329.

Winter, C. (2017). Curriculum Policy Reform in an Era of Technical Accountability: "Fixing" Curriculum, Teachers and Students in English Schools. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *49*(1), 55–74.

Appendix D: Critique of papers using the CASP for Literature Review 1

	Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Is qualitative methodology appropriate?	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Is there a clear statement of findings?	How valuable is the research?
Chapman (2002)	Yes – to explore teachers' perceptions of Ofsted's contribution to school improvement in schools identified by the DfES as 'facing challenging circumstances'	Yes – piece of exploratory research – qual most appropriate	Yes – mixed method, case study approach – interviews, surveys, documentary evidence	Yes – considered the selection of the 10 schools in relation to represent a wide range of contexts and variation in characteristics "ensuring 'maximum variation sampling'"	Yes – clear description of interviews, although unclear on the procedures of obtaining and analysing 'documentary evidence'	No – no evidence of examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position.	Yes – consideration taken in regards to consent and the checking of the data with participants.	Yes – reference made to 'codes' and 'themes' but unclear how these were devised. However, sufficient data was presented to support the findings (quotes)	Yes – findings are explicit and discussed extensively. Have also considered how findings relate to research question and the credibility of findings	Very – recommendations made for future frameworks and inspection systems, and suggestions for future research.
Coldwell & Willis (2017)	Yes – how do teachers and school leaders respond to high stakes testing of	Yes – qualitative seemed most appropriat	Yes – used case study visits and telephone interviews	Yes – 'sampling matrix' used to select schools	Yes – described use of semi-structured interviews	No – no evidence of examining own role / bias /	Yes – ethics discussed in detail	Yes – thematic analysis used and described	Yes – clear statement of findings and how this relates	Very – L6 tests have been abandoned, but the researchers

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	pupils transitioning from primary to secondary school?	e although did not state purpose of research (e.g. exploratory, explanatory etc). Appears to be exploratory.	to investigate how schools supported pupils for entry to level 6 tests, and why they chose to enter them	broadly representative in relation to percentage of the y6 cohort entered for L6 tests, as well as number of overall school population characteristics.	with description and justification of questions asked. Conducted further interviews when they got more info from the initial.	influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position.			to research question. Although did not consider the limitations of research, other than the fact that L6 tests no longer exist.	have considered how these findings could be applied to other tests. However, there is little suggestion as to how these findings could be used. There was a suggestion to look further at boundary signifiers to help 'shed light' but not clear how this can be used.
Collins. Reiss & Stobart (2010)	Yes – to explore the perceived impact of compulsory national testing in science on Y6 teachers and the teaching of science in England as well as the perceived impact of the abolition of such testing in science on Y6	Yes – the main method was qualitative to elicit detail, but they also used quant for breadth	Yes – using mixed methods allowed for depth and breadth – so it had generalisability	Yes – random sampling through a telephone survey for the quant – 600 teachers. Then for the qual (focus groups) canvassed over 100 schools. Good variety of ppts.	Yes – telephone survey allowed for a wide and large selection of ppts for quant. Focus groups allowed insight to be gained. Was well justified	No – no evidence of examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position.	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics.	Yes – clearly stated how quant was analysed (chi square). Qual made mention of coding and themes, but no detail as to how this was done.	Yes – clear statement of findings with adequate discussion, although very little mention of limitations of the research.	Very – It is useful – especially the comparison between England and Wales. However, researchers seemed to want to avoid making any recommendations as to what could be done

	teachers in Wales				by researcher.			However sufficient data was presented to support the findings (quotes) and presented critically		with this information, except for "the sky does not fall in when high-stakes testing stops and teaching and learning may be enriched"
Dymoke (2012)	Yes – to explore how a group of English teachers in NZ and England are able to respond to contextual factors in their poetry teaching during a time of curriculum change.	Yes – research seems to be exploratory so Qual makes sense – looking to illuminate actions.	Yes – semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, with a justification	Yes – convenience sample used, and this seemed adequate. Researcher explored the demographics of schools used.	Can't tell – described interviews used, however, not clear what they were looking for in the observations of how that was analysed	No – mentioned that they were familiar with the schools through work but did not mention or consider how this may have impacted the research	Yes – ethics considered and discussed	Yes – grounded theory approach used (although little description on what this actually looked like in practice)	Yes – clear statements of findings with adequate discussion	Very – Some suggestion about building teachers' confidence with poetry and how. But in terms of issues with the curriculum, the suggestion is for teachers to "ask publicly" about it, which isn't necessarily useful
Elton & Male (2015)	Yes – to investigate the impact on members of an English primary school community as it went through	Yes – clearly stated rationale for methodology – interpretiv	Yes – justified the design, seemed most appropriate for research aims	Yes – clearly discussed how the research was opportunistic, and was undertaken because they	Yes – explored the context of the data collection in detail, with justification of the use of	Yes – clearly explored the researchers' involvement in the school and the impact of this on the	Yes – consideration of ethics throughout, although no clear statement	Can't tell – analysis process not explained. However. They used sufficient data	Yes – clear statement of findings discussed in a critical way	Very – Was very illuminating and was valuable in terms of getting an insight into this

	transformation to an academy following an inspection by Ofsted that identified the school as inadequate	e case study, seeking answers to 'what' and 'how' questions		were involved in the school.	interviews, and how this needed to be adapted during the study. All very clear.	research. Weighed up the pros and cons of their role as governor for the school and their position as researcher. Also stated the paradigm of the research. Very clear.	of ethics. Seemed adequate though.	(quotes) to support their interpretation		process and what it's actually liked. However, was quite 'doom and gloom' with no suggestion of how these findings can be used.
Forrester (2005)	Yes – to explore primary teachers' perspectives on the new managerial discourses in schools.	Yes – researcher justified why qual was chosen – focus on subjective experiences	Yes – description of types of questions asked in the interview and why	Can't tell – unclear how the schools and teachers were chosen to take part, but researcher showed consideration of the demographics of schools chosen	Yes – clear justification of chosen method with description of question topics.	No – no evidence of examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position.	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics.	Yes – clear description of three stages of analysis, with sufficient data used to support findings.	Yes – clear statement and critical discussion of findings	Very – The findings were valuable in that it illuminated the impact of performance related pay, but it ended in a critique of the policy with no discussion of how these findings could be used.
Gibbons (2019)	No – aim was rather vague – 'to explore the teaching of writing'	Yes – considering the openness and vagueness of what the	Yes – used questionnaire and focus group although little	Yes – seemed to be opportunity sample of PGCE trainee teachers, although	Yes – was extremely vague which is not surprising considering the	No – there is a suggestion that the participants may be known to the researcher,	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics.	Can't tell – no description of analysis of data at all, but did use data	Yes – clear statement of findings discussed critically, with some limitations	Very – Illuminating findings and an interesting critique on the teaching of writing.

		researcher was aiming for, qual makes sense.	justification of why	little discussion as to why and under what circumstances they were recruited	vagueness of the aim. As this was very exploratory in nature, seemed appropriate	but there is no consideration as to how this may have impacted the research. Researcher mentioned their desire to join in the focus group, but did not consider why or what this means in terms of their objectivity		(quotes) to justify findings	of research considered	However, very critical with no suggestion of how the research could be used.
Guimaraes, Howe, Clausen & Cottle (2016)	Yes – teachers' and head teachers' experiences of piloting the observation-led baseline assessment for reception	Yes – the focus is on perspectives, so qual appropriate	Yes – description of areas explored in interview and why	Can't tell – unclear how participants were selected – schools were part of a pilot but unclear whether this research was part of the pilot or not	Yes – use of semi-structured interviews, although little description of this and why	No – no evidence of examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position.	Yes – statement that ethical guidelines considered and followed	Can't tell – mention of themes, but not clear how the data was analysed. No description.	Yes – clear statement and discussion of findings, with sufficient data presented, although limitations of research not considered.	Very – Clear implications given with suggestions of how the research can be used, and suggestion for future research.

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Holmes (2017)	Yes – to investigate the motivations behind why teachers dedicate non-directed time to school-related tasks and the extent to which managers understand and harness these motivations	Yes – interested in teacher and management perceptions, so qual appropriate	Yes – research design justified (use of case studies – questionnaire and interviews)	Can't tell – description of school given with demographic details, but unclear how that school was chosen	Yes – although not much description on the focus of the interviews and survey	No – no evidence of examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position.	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics.	Can't tell – analysis process not explained. However. They used sufficient data (quotes) to support their interpretation	Yes – clear statement and discussion of findings, with sufficient data presented, although limitations of research not considered.	Very – Interesting and illuminating, with a suggestion of how the results can be used by managers to create a more positive working environment for teachers, and ensure support for pupils
Kendall (2019)	Yes – to explore practitioner perspectives on effective inclusion within a school environment	Yes – looking to explore perspectives. Researcher justified use of qual	Yes – semi-structured interviews used, with justification	Yes – consideration given to the demographics of participants and the context of the school.	Yes – data collection described and justified, with description of 2 main themes the questions fell under	No – researcher mentions that the school is personally known to them and they have 'long standing off working with children in SEN in a school environment' but has not considered how these things may	Yes – ethics discussed sufficiently	Can't tell – discussed data being 'colour coded into themes' but the process of this is unclear. However, they have used sufficient data (quotes) to support their themes	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion, and consideration of limitations	Very – Author admits that researcher doesn't offer 'a conclusive answer regarding inclusive education' but does highlight important areas for further research.

						have impacted the research.				
Lambirth et al (2012)	Yes – to explore the perceptions of poetry teaching	Yes – exploring perceptions	Yes – full and clear justification of research design	Yes – recruitment methods explained and justified	Yes – clear description and justification of data collection. Very thorough	No – no evidence of examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position.	Yes – ethics discussed sufficiently	Yes – explanation as to how themes were generated, with consideration of how this was impacted by the questions asked	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – Author suggests implications and recommend-actions from the research findings. Also suggestion for future research.
Lefstein (2013)	Yes – to explore the regime for the regulation of school teaching in England, and how this regime shapes discourses about success-and-failure, social class and the allocation of blame.	Yes – exploratory and looking at discourses	Yes – case study approach with multiple data collection methods justified	Can't tell – this research was part of a broader case-study into this school. References were supplied to other papers describing this work which may have gone into more detail about how/why this school was chosen	Can't tell – similarly, this paper doesn't go into extensive description of data collection methods, but directs the reader to references where it presumably is	No – the researcher doesn't explicitly consider their bias / influence but the paper is written in a way where their political opinion is interpretable	Can't tell – not mentioned in this paper, but potentially mentioned in the others that the reader is directed towards	Can't tell – not mentioned in this paper, but potentially mentioned in the others that the reader is directed towards. However, they have used sufficient data (quotes) to support	Yes – findings are explicit and discussed, although arguably arguments against not considered – felt quite one-sided	Very – Extremely insightful. Suggestion to stop 'blame' and to look at the 'complex relationships between multiple factors' but no suggestion as to how. Also, ironically, the findings seem very 'blame-y'

								their themes		
Lumb (2014)	Yes – to develop an understanding of the spiritual dimension of a CoE school and how spirituality is developed and nurtured	Yes – the focus was exploratory although this was not discussed explicitly	Can't tell – seemed appropriate although this was not explained or justified in any level of detail	Yes – explained that recruitment was done through a contact, but no real description of how or why it was chosen. However, the school's demographics we discussed in relation to its appropriateness	Can't tell – data collection methods were listed, but not described, explained or justified	No – no evidence of examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position.	Yes – ethics discussed sufficiently	Yes – analysis method described, referenced and justified	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – Difficult for me to consider the value as, in general, I don't agree with faith schools. However, a very interesting illumination of how current education system stifles exploration and enforces a binary idea of 'right' and 'wrong' in terms of knowledge. The suggestions and recommendations made for spirituality can be applied to abstract thinking and fostering a sense of 'wander' and

										'critique' in young people
Nicholl & McLellan (2008)	Yes – to explore how secondary subject specialists try to implement the creativity and performativity agenda, in a subject such as D&T, where there is an expectation, at least by policy makers, for students to think creatively.	Yes – the focus was exploratory although this was not discussed explicitly. Quotative data also gained to ensure depth and breadth	Yes – clear justification of research design	Yes – justification of recruitment methods given, with discussion of demographic details of the schools and why they were important. However, not clear how these schools were approached.	Yes – data collection clearly described and justified. Multiple data collection methods employed with justification of each given in turn	No – no evidence of examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position.	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics.	Yes – analysis method described, referenced and justified	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – Extremely illuminating which was due to the specific focus, but has potential for transferability. It is important that some of these practices were brought to light, and consideration of why, but there's little discussion from the researchers as to what can be done with this information and future directions
O'Leary (2013)	Yes - investigating the ways in which the professional identity, learning and development of FE tutors were being shaped through the use	Yes – qual appropriate for the exploratory nature	Yes – clear and detailed justification of case study research design	Yes – justification of the use of chosen schools given	Yes – although not much detail on what the interviews looked like or focus of the questions. However,	No – no evidence of examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics, although this may be because this research is part of a	Can't tell – not mentioned in this paper, but potentially mentioned in the others that the reader	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – Implications clearly discussed with suggestions of how practice could be altered to ensure better outcomes or

	of observation of teaching and learning.				this was part of a wider study which may be why.	Epistemological position.	wider study, so may have been discussed elsewhere	is directed towards. However, they have used sufficient data (quotes) to support their themes		teaching and learning.
Plowright (2007)	Yes – how staff felt about the Ofsted self-evaluation process	Yes – discussed using an interpretivist paradigm to justify qual	Yes – use of case study design explored in detail and justified	Can't tell – description given of the case study school, but unclear how this school was chose, and how they recruited the staff within the school for the interviews	Yes – use of interviews which was appropriate. Adequate description of the interviews given (unstructured).	No – it is unclear what the researcher's relationship with this school is, and no evidence of examining own role / bias / influence. However, research paradigm was stated.	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics.	Can't tell – no description of analysis of data at all, but did use data (quotes) to justify findings	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – Interesting and illuminating. Highlights that for things to be different, changes at central government policy level is need, but doesn't say what that change should be. No implications for the research or suggestion for future research.
Taber et al (2011)	Yes – to explore the developing thinking about assessment of	Yes – researchers stated that they want	Yes – use of interviews discussed and justified	Yes – convenience sample used – course	Yes – the use of interviews was	Yes – considered their place	Yes – statement of following	Yes – analysis method described,	Yes – findings are explicit with	Very – Extensive thought given to further

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	graduate trainees preparing for secondary teaching in England	to gain insight		lecturers recommended students who they thought would be comfortable at interview. Ensured demographics represented the cohort	described. Used pilot interviews as well to ensure questions addressed their research issue	within the programme	ethical guidelines	referenced and justified	adequate discussion	research, with list of potential research areas. Also explained how this research can then be used in the future to help design teacher training programmes
Troman et al (2007)	Yes – to analyse the effects of creativity and performativity policy initiatives at the implementation stage	Yes – qual methodology was justified- to understand the 'complexities'	Yes – use of ethnographic design – observations and interviews/ Conversations - justified	Not sure – this study was part of wider research and doesn't go into recruitment strategy. However, demographics discussed in terms of why schools were appropriate.	Yes – data collection methods clearly described and justified	No – no evidence of examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position. Considering long term involvement due to ethnographic approach, this is a particular weakness	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics, although this may be because this research is part of a wider study, so may have been discussed elsewhere	Can't tell – no description of analysis of data at all, but did use data (quotes) to justify findings	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – Illuminating research, part of a wider study. Very little on implications and future research, but may be because further parts of the research will illuminate more before the researchers conclude.
Williams (2017)	Yes - To what extent and why do Heads of PE adopt a	Yes – mainly qual with some quant	Yes – research design discussed	Not sure – questionnaire data seemed to be	Yes – data collection method	No – no evidence of examining own role /	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics,	Yes – analysis method described,	Yes – findings are explicit with	Very – Illuminating and interesting but no

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	language of performativity within their own constructions of leadership?	which was fully justified by researchers	with full justification	taken from previous research, so was not described in this paper. However, a reference was given so possibly has been justified there?	clear with justification	bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position.	although this may be because data was collected from previous study where ethics had been considered	referenced and justified	adequate discussion	consideration of the implications of these findings or suggestions for future research.
Winter (2017)	Yes – to explore teachers'/education stakeholders' experiences of curriculum in 'disadvantaged' English secondary schools in order to understand ethical relations arising when technical accountability dominates curriculum and assessment policy reform.	Yes – researcher stated that interest was in perspectives	Yes – research design described and justified	Not sure – justification given of the participants involved, but not sure how they were recruited	Yes – data collection method clear with justification	No – no evidence of examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position. This is particularly problematic as the researcher joined in.	Yes – statement that ethical approval was obtained	Yes – analysis method described, referenced and justified	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – Extremely interesting findings with a unique take looking at ethics which is valuable. However, no suggestion of implications or future research

Appendix E: Search result from Literature Review 2 before application of exclusion criteria

Anderson, N., & Peart, S. (2016). Back on Track: Exploring How a Further Education College Re-Motivates Learners to Re-Sit Previously Failed Qualifications at GCSE. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, *21*(3), 196–213.

Bain, M., & O'Hagan, F. J. (1979). Remedial Education and Adult Literacy. *Forum for the Discussion of New Trends in Education*, *21*(3), 113–115.

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Hoodless, P. (2004). "Are You Just Helping?" The Perceptions and Experiences of Minority Ethnic Trainees on a One-Year Primary Initial Teacher Training Course. *Research in Education*, *72*, 32–46.

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Maylor, U. (2009). "They Do Not Relate to Black People like Us": Black Teachers as Role Models for Black Pupils. *Journal of Education Policy*, *24*(1), 1–21.

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Appendix F: List of included papers for Literature Review 2

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Walters, S. (2007). How Do You Know that He's Bright but Lazy? Teachers' Assessments of Bangladeshi English as an Additional Language Pupils in Two Year Three Classrooms. *Oxford Review of Education*, *33*(1), 87–101.

Appendix G: Critique of papers using the CASP for Literature Review 2

	Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Is qualitative methodology appropriate?	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Have ethical issues been taken into considerat-ion?	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Is there a clear statement of findings?	How valuable is the research?
Bradbury (2011)	Yes - how assessment results may be in flu-enced by pressure from external advisors, who only recognise certain patterns of results as intelligible. However, this is a highly biased aim!	Yes – qual appropriate although researcher doesn't make this justification explicit	Yes – ethnographic seems appropriate, although little to no justification of this choice	Can't tell – unclear how the schools were chosen. Also, the reception teachers interviewed were both men, which the researcher highlighted as unusual, but did not seem to question whether this was therefore appropriate	Yes – use of interviews and observations appropriate for the ethnographic study, although again there is little justification	No – no evidence of explicitly examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position. This is surprising considering the tone of the paper suggests that the researcher is, indeed, coming from a biased position	Yes – ethical considerations discussed	Yes - analysis method described, referenced and justified	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – extremely important to illuminate how the EYFSP produces inequality, rather than simply recording it. However, little suggestion of implications or future research.

Kelly et al (2013)	Yes - how teachers' roles in lower-secondary mathematics teaching vary within and between Denmark and England.	Yes – researchers discussed the many influences on the construction of teaching, and how it is tied to contexts, so qual appropriate	Yes – research design clearly described and justified	Yes – justification given as to why schools were chosen, although not completely clear how they were approached	Yes – use of obs, interviews and focus groups described and justified	No – no evidence of explicitly examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position.	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics.	Yes - analysis method described and justified	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – clear suggestions as to how to improve mathematical success with suggestion of further research to make this clearer.
Mazenod et al. (2018)	Yes – teacher perspectives on teaching and learning in lower attaining groups	Yes – Part of a wider study where quant data was collected through a questionnaire - researchers then wanted more detail on perspectives through qual.	Yes – clear description of design (interviews and focus groups) with justification (for depth and breadth)	Yes – clear description of recruitment methods with justification	Yes – use of interviews and focus groups described and justified	No – no evidence of explicitly examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position.	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics, but part of a wider study so possible that it has been considered and discussed elsewhere	Yes - analysis method described and justified in detail	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – extremely illuminating in terms of how teachers see low attaining kids, and researchers make clear recommendations based on the implications of their findings to ensure better learning for this
Rustique-Forrester (2005)	Yes - To investigate whether and how the pressures from national reforms may	Yes – looking at teacher perceptions, although researchers don't	Yes – Clear description of design	Yes – clear description justification as to what schools were chosen to	Yes – use of interviews with areas of questioning described	No – no evidence of explicitly examining own role / bias / influence. Has	Can't tell – confidentiality considered but no other discussion of ethics	Can't tell – mention of themes, but not clear how the data	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate	Very - massively enlightening to see the impact of accountability measures on exclusions. Researchers

	have contributed to the rise in exclusion,	explicitly justify this		take part and why, although unclear how these schools were approached		not stated ontological/ Epistemological position		was analysed..	discussion	used these findings as a 'cautionary tale' and gave extensive implications and recommendations for US schools. Although aimed at a US audience, these same recommendations can and should be applied to the UK context .
Singal & Swann (2009)	Yes - to develop deeper understandings of children's learning, of their strengths and needs Research Papers in Education 3 both within, and beyond, the formal school context and the factors	Yes – researchers stated that study is exploratory and looking at constructions	Yes – interviewing children, parents and teachers justified by authors in relation to the aim	Yes – recruitment fully explained and justified, including changes made from the original recruitment plan and why	Yes – data collection methods described extensively with full justification	No – no evidence of explicitly examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position	Yes – ethical considerations discussed	Yes - analysis method described and justified	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – especially due to the triangulation, looking at children, parent and teacher perceptions. Implications discussed with recommendations given, and areas for future research.

	which they identify as nurturing their learning capacity.									
Smith (2010)	Yes - to explore teaching assistants' (TAs) perceptions of suggestions that English schools should encourage large numbers of 'low-achieving' school leavers to become apprentice teaching assistants.	Yes – research is exploring perceptions, although researchers don't explicitly justify this	Yes – ethnographic approach seems appropriate, although not explicitly justified by researchers	Can't tell – unclear how participants were recruited, although demographic details given with justification of the geographical spread. This study is part of a wider piece of research so possibly justified elsewhere?	Can't tell – very little information given about the data collection process. However, part of a wider piece of research so possibly justified elsewhere?	No – no evidence of explicitly examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position	Yes – ethical considerations discussed	Can't tell – no description of analysis of data at all, but did use data (quotes) to justify findings	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – Implications clearly discussed with recommendations made
Thompson et al (2016)	Yes – to explore student teachers' developing understandings of the influences of economic disadvantage	Yes – justification of qualitative and quantitative methods	Yes – research design fully described and justified	Yes – used students from own course, although unclear how the focus group was chosen	Yes – data collection methods described extensively	No – no evidence of explicitly examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics	Yes – data analysis of quantitative date clearly described, although not clear how qual data was	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – clear implications of research given. Extremely important for social justice.

	on educational achievement and subsequent life opportunities.					Epistemological position. This is particularly problematic considering the researcher taught the course		analysed. But did use quotes to justify findings.		
Walters (2017)	Yes - how teachers come to assess pupils' needs and abilities and how pupils come to acquire particular identities in the classroom—particularly Bangladeshi pupils who are both English as an Additional Language (EAL) and minority ethnic pupils.	Yes – looking at experiences, although this was not explicitly justified	Yes – ethnographic design appropriate, although not explicitly justified	Can't tell – recruitment methods not discussed, although participants were appropriate to the research aim	Yes – use of obs, and interviews over the year, although again, this was not explicitly justified	No – no evidence of explicitly examining own role / bias / influence. Has not stated ontological/ Epistemological position	Can't tell – no discussion of ethics	Can't tell – no description of analysis of data at all, but did use data (quotes) to justify findings	Yes – findings are explicit with adequate discussion	Very – extremely illuminating with thought provoking findings, however the researcher doesn't suggest how these findings could be used or future research

Appendix H: Participant information sheet

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

Department of Education and Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
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Fax: +44 (0) 20 7447 3837

Information Sheet

Title: Teacher Accountability Measures and Low Attaining Students, A Critical Discourse Analysis.

Who is doing the research?
My name is Leila Yahyaoui. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) in my second year of studying for the Professional Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology. I am carrying out this research as part of my course.

What is the aim of the research?
The research aims to explore GCSE teachers' discourses about low-attaining students in relation to accountability measures as set out by education policy (league tables, Ofsted and performance related pay).

Who has given permission for this research?
The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust has given ethical approval to carry out this research. The Local Authority Educational Psychology Service has also given permission for the research to go ahead.

Who can take part in this research?
I am looking for year 11 teachers who do not hold leadership responsibility and who have taught year 11 for at least one year in their current school. At least 20% of their timetable needs to made up of year 11 lessons.

I have obtained permission from the Headteacher to include between 6 and 12 teachers from your school. However, if less than 6 teachers consent to take part, I will not be able to

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carry on with the research here and will seek to recruit in a different school. If more than 12 teachers consent, they will be chosen on a first come, first served basis.

What does participation involve?
If you agree to take part, you will be asked to attend a focus group alongside other year 11 teachers within your school. If school closures continue and an in-person focus group is unable to take place by the 1st October 2020, you will instead be invited to take part remotely using Zoom.

Within the focus group, you will be asked to discuss how accountability measures (such as league tables, Ofsted and performance related pay) influence your teaching. In particular, you will be asked to discuss this in relation to the low attaining students in your year 11 classes.

There will be a total of 6-12 participants within the focus group, which will last for approximately 60-90 minutes. The focus group will be scheduled towards the end of the summer term, once the year 11 exams have finished.

The focus group will be recorded (as an audio recording) and transcribed before being analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis. This form of analysis will look at the focus group's conversations within the context of the current political climate and the power relationships that are present within education and your school.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
It is hoped that, for participants, participation will be a stimulating experience, providing opportunities to reflect on practice. More widely, it is hoped that the findings will bring greater awareness to the political context in which teachers work, demonstrating how teachers' discourses can uphold and/or challenge the political system.

What are the possible risks of taking part?
Talking about the experiences of being a teacher could be emotive. However, the open ended nature of a focus group gives freedom to choose what to share. After the data has been analysed and published, the findings of the study could conflict with participants' values, beliefs and/or political opinions. However, the results are intended to be one possible interpretation of the data rather than seeking to find 'truth'. At all points of the study, participants will have the option to access additional support from myself or other services, which will be signposted if required.

What will happen to the findings from the research?
The findings will be typed up as part of my thesis which will be read by examiners and be available at the Tavistock and Portman library. I may also publish the research, at a later date, in a peer-reviewed journal. Participants will have the option to read a summary of my findings or the full thesis once the analysis has been completed.

What will happen if participants don't want to carry on with this research?
Participation in this research is voluntary and if you do consent to participate, you are free to withdraw from the research at any time before or during the focus group, without giving

a reason. It will not be possible to withdraw individual's data upon completion of the focus group, as the nature of a focus group means individual contributions will be intertwined with others. However, if you do choose to participate and you wish to withdraw your personal information either during or after the focus group has taken place, I can ensure that your personal contributions (quotes) are not included in the reporting of the study. If this is not satisfactory, the focus group can and will be stopped entirely and the recording deleted.

Will participants' information be kept confidential?
Yes. All records related to participation in this research study will be handled and stored securely on an encrypted drive using password protection. Identity on these records will be indicated by a pseudonym rather than a name. The data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years. Data collected during the study will be stored and used in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act (1998) and the University's Data Protection Policy.

Are there times when data cannot be kept confidential?
Confidentiality is subject to legal limitations or if a disclosure is made that suggests that imminent harm to self and/or others may occur. The small sample size (6-12 teachers) may also mean that participants recognise some examples and experiences shared in the focus group. However, to protect participants' identities, pseudonyms will be used and any identifiable details changed.

Further information and contact details
If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of the research, please contact me:
Email: Lyahyaoui@tavi-port.nhs.uk
Telephone: 0207 525 1573

If you have any concerns about the research then you can contact Paru Jeram who works for the Tavistock and Portman research department. His contact details are:
Email: pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Appendix I: Participant consent form

The Tavistock and Portman NHS

NHS Foundation Trust

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120 Belsize Lane
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Tel: +44 (0) 20 7435 7111
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7447 3837

Research Title: Teacher Accountability Measures and Low Attaining Students, A Critical Discourse Analysis.

Please initial the statements below if you agree with them: **Initial here:**

1. I have read and understood the information sheet, have been given a copy to keep, and have had the chance to ask questions.	
2. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I am free at any time to withdraw from the focus group without giving a reason.	
3. I understand that after the completion of the focus group, I will be unable to withdraw my data. However, I understand that I can request for my data to not be quoted when the study is reported, without giving a reason.	
4. I agree for my audio to be recorded during the focus group.	
5. I understand that my data will be anonymised so that I cannot be linked to the data. I understand that the sample size is small.	
6. I understand that there are limitations to confidentiality relating to legal duties and threat of harm to self or others.	
7. I understand that my contributions to the focus group will be used for this research and cannot be accessed for any other purposes.	
8. I understand that the findings from this research will be published in a thesis and potentially in a presentation or peer reviewed journal.	
9. I am willing to participate in this research.	

Your name (BLOCK CAPITALS): ……………………………………………………………………………………………….
Signed…………………………………………………………………….   Date……../……../……..
Researcher name: Leila Yahyaoui
Signed……………………………………………………………….   Date……../……../……..
Thank you for your help.

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Appendix J: Focus group introduction script

Good afternoon and thank you for attending this focus group.

My name is Leila Yahyaoui and I'm a trainee educational psychologist undertaking a professional doctorate at the Tavistock and Portman NHS trust and on placement at Southwark educational psychology service. Before starting my doctoral training, I taught for six years – 3 years in a secondary school teaching GCSE and A level Psychology, as well as a bit of BTEC and KS3 humanities, and 3 years in a 6th form college teaching just A level Psychology.

For my research, I have chosen to explore GCSE teachers' discourses about low-attaining students in relation to accountability measures as set out by education policy (league tables, Ofsted and performance related pay). As teachers of year 11, you've been invited here to discuss your thoughts and experiences in relation to this topic.

I shall be recording the audio of this session using two phones – one merely as a back up. I will type up a transcription of the session, and then permanently delete the recording. Your names, as well as the school name, will not be used in the transcription or in any of the subsequent write up of the thesis, so your contributions will be kept confidential. The only limitation of this is if there is a disclosure made that suggests imminent harm may occur. It is important that as a group, there is a shared agreement of confidentiality with each other. It is important that everyone feels they are able to share freely in this space. So could we all agree on a ground rule of confidentiality – what is said in this group stays in this group.

I'd like to remind you that your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw now or at any point during the focus group, without giving a reason. However, if you do choose to withdraw during or after the group, you will be unable to withdraw your individual data entirely due to the nature of a focus group (what you say may trigger and be entangled in what someone else says), but if you aren't comfortable having your individual contributions shared, I can ensure that they are not included in the reporting of the study.

Are there any questions at this point?

PAUSE FOR QUESTIONS

Okay, so for the purposes of the recording and learning your voice for transcription, could we please go around the room. If you could say your name, a bit about your role and experience of teaching, and perhaps one surprising thing you enjoyed during lockdown. I shall start the recording.

INTROS

Lovely, let's get started. After I read out the stimulus of what I'd like you to talk about, I will move outside of the circle - please consider me as merely an observer during this focus

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group! The conversation is very much amongst yourselves with each other. I have also given you a prompt sheet that you can refer to if you forget what I've asked for you to talk about! Please keep it on the table as the paper noises come out very loud on the recording!

Current education policy measures school success through a variety of accountability measures. Schools are held accountable by league tables and Ofsted inspections. Teachers are individually held accountable through Performance Related Pay. All of these accountability measures largely revolve around the academic attainment of students as measured by high-stakes testing. Therefore, low-attaining students can be seen as evidence of schools' and teachers' shortcomings.

I would like you to discuss your thoughts and experiences of these accountability measures in regards to the low-attaining students in your classes.

Appendix K: Focus group transcript

1   Moderator: Amazing, thank you, okay, so let's get started. Um, so in front of you there's
2   piece of paper, if you can turn it over, and this is to help you-, to help prompt you in case
3   you forget what I say right now. Um, I will ask you to keep the paper flat on the table
4   because the noise is really loud on the recording if you move it around. So, current
5   education policy measures school success from a variety of accountability measures.
6   Schools are held accountable by league tables and Ofsted inspections. Teachers are
7   individually held accountable through performance-related pay. All of these accountability
8   measures largely revolve around the academic attainment of students as measured by high-
9   stakes testing. Therefore, low-attaining students can be seen as evidence of schools' and
10 teachers' shortcomings. I would like you to discuss your thoughts and experience of-,
11 experiences of these accountability measures in regards to the low-attaining students in
12 your classes. Okay? I'm very much outside of the group, I'm going to sit over there, and I
13 very much just want you to have a conversation about that.

14 P1: Can I just ask one question? The school you said would all be anonymous.

15 Moderator: Yes, absolutely anonymous.

16 P1: Okay. So, I actually-, this'll maybe start the conversation off. I, […], part of my job is to
17 review Year 11 data at the end of-…, after GCSEs, and SEN data has traditionally not been
18 very good. Now, I don't think that that's on account of… individual, kind of, teaching…
19 because I think as individuals we all really care about that. I think probably… it's the fault
20 of… things like this that can hinder progress… and I've got to formulate this thought before I
21 say it… Because if we're thinking about, like with, um,… the league tables and stuff, some of
22 it's based on, like, where kids go next, right? That can dictate how you're doing nationally.
23 It's, like, what kids have got five A*-C, or now 9-4, what kids have gone on to do academic A
24 levels. Kids who may not achieve those 9-4,… do they just, kind of, get overseen because it's,
25 like, 'Well that kid's not going to get near the 4 that-, the 4 that we need,… and so therefore
26 that isn't going to take the energy that, say, this mid set are going to get because it's a good
27 chance that they'll get 4s'? So, are we just so driven by the data at the end, that it can, kind
28 of, mean that kids… lose out?

29 P2: Because you're not seeing where they've come from because they could have come
30 from a really low P scale where they can barely write a sentence, and if they manage to get
31 a 2 or a 3, that's a massive achievement-,

32 P1: Yeah.

33 P2: But because it's below that cut-off-,

34 P1: Mmhmm.

35   P2: They're, sort of,… not necessarily tossed aside, but-,

36   P1: Mmhmm.

37   P6: I think, those children's well-being sometimes get left in the dust when we're thinking
38   about that because I think-,

39   P1: Yeah.

40   P6: Personal accountability, school accountability, everyone's worried about their
41   accountability, and actually I think these children feel either that they're not doing enough
42   because they're being told, 'Oh, you should be getting this,' or, 'You could be getting this,' or
43   by-, this is the message they get across the school, and then they feel like even if try hard,
44   what they produce is never good enough because it falls short of those kind of grades that
45   we want them to be getting. Particularly, like, I'm talking about the ones on, like, 2s and 3s-,

46   P1: Yeah, yeah.

47   P6: They could get a 4 if they really, like, smashed it but the-they are so stretched, and I
48   think in all of the, like, ( ), like, teachers' personal concerns about performance-related pay,
49   all of that, the actual child and how they feel, like, the moments of being, like, proud of
50   something, or-, get forgotten a lot.

51   P1: Mmhmm, yeah.

52   P6: And I think that really-, I find that really, really difficult and really upsetting…
53   sometimes.

54   P1: And I guess also, because what we're constantly working towards is the exam at the
55   end, right?

56   P6: Yeah.

57   P1: How often can you just, like, pause in your practice and be like, 'Let's do something…
58   fun-

59   P6: (laughs)

60   P1: -or, like, let's hear your opinions on something'? Like, every lesson's like, 'Right, that's
61   the exam, we've got it in eight months' time, let's go.' And that's because we constantly feel
62   this pressure, right?

63   Group: Mmm.

64   P5: It's horrible

65   P2: But then it's also the ones who, I don't know, like the-, like, the weakest ones who…
66   may not score particularly well, however they've learnt how to communicate better with
67   somebody.

68   P1: Mmm.

69   P2: Then they can now have strong, good conversation by saying, you know, 'Good
70   morning, how are you? Der, der, der, der,' but nobody marks them for that.

71   P1: Yeah.

72   P2: But that's-, that could be a massive achievement for them. But, you know, you're not
73   going to get a GCSE in it.

74   P1: Does it get spotted by Ofsted though?

75   P2: I think if they came round, you'd like to think that they would.

76   P1: I guess Ofsted don't see progress, but I think they do see care.

77   P2: Hmm.

78   P1: I think…

79   P2: More so now than they used to, I think.

80   P1: Right. See, I, I-, my, this is, like, my sixth year, so my only experience of Ofsted was here-

81   P2: Yeah.

82   P1: -[…], and so I guess the role that I played in that-,

83   P2: But it's still data-driven though, isn't it?

84   P6: Yeah.

85   P2: They still want to see-

86   P1: But we also had a lot of chat about-, yeah, true, yeah, it's data-driven.

87   P6: Because, like, they'll come in-,

88   P1: Always.

89   P6: -with their data and have made up their minds because, like, a lot I think because of the
90   data.

91   P2: But they can see some progress. Because that's what they always want to see, isn't it,
92   some progress, but if you can-,

93   P6: But I'm not saying there shouldn't be accountability, because there should, like, 'cause
94   kids can get a really bad deal if there is no accountability, like, there needs to be
95   accountability.

96   P1: True.

97   P6: But I think there are, like, particularly low-attaining that suffer from this model.

98   P1: Mmm. …Is the-, but is the performance pay, [Participant 4], you might-, in my time here
99   I don't think that my pay has only gone up based on results.

100   P4: No, it's not the be-all and end-all, I don't think.

101   P1: No.

102   P4: There's other things that are taken into consideration.

103   P1: 'Cause I had a class once who did very badly… and my pay still went up the following
104   year.

105   P4: Is that why you're asking me, just to-,

106   (laughter)

107   P1: Yeah, 'cause your classes do very badly! (Laughter). No, I mean, because from my
108   experience and from chatting to people,… pay generally does go up every year. I don't know
109   if it's performance here.

110   P4: Well, the performance is everything, isn't it? So, it could be… extracurricular things that
111   you're running, it could be-, or it's just your responsibilities-,… I said it wasn't the be-all and
112   end-all, but actually I think-,

113   P2: It's always your first target, isn't it?

114   P4: Yeah, so if you didn't hit it-,

115   P2: Or you can give them a legitimate reason why you haven't hit it.

116   P4: It's, it's the most important thing isn't it, definitely, and everything else comes second,
117   which, I guess, says a lot about… your role as a teacher-,

118   P1: Yeah.

119   P4: That you have to hit that, that data point before anything else.

120   P1: Yeah.

121   P5: Because I wonder how it's addressed if you don't-, (talking over each other).

122   P1: Well, I haven't, there have been times when I haven't met it, and the children-, Because
123   the nature of the targets that you have to set, this thing that you're constantly working
124   towards, it's, like, you have to get-,… like this, I've got top set, Year 11, 90% of them have to
125   get above 7, it's not going to happen. So-, and what the conversation is going to be like,
126   you've done-,

127   P5: Only 60% reach a 7.

128   P1: Yeah.

129   P4: Well, you almost identify students in your class when you know the percentage that
130   you're required to get.

131   P1: Yeah, yeah.

132   P4: And I know it's bad, but you almost pick people out and say, 'No chance.'

133   P6: Mmm.

134   P1: Yeah.

135   P4: And then you're thinking ahead to whenever and just, you know. So-, which isn't fair on
136   the student-,

137   P1: No.

138   P4: Because it's not, you know-,

139   P5: And those that are at horse-trading, are they going to pass, yes or no?

140   P1: Yeah.

141   P5: No, okay, we won't put them in the intervention, where else can we put them? Okay,
142   we'll put them there.

143   P1: Yeah, and that horse-trading's quite brutal because it's all about who's going to get the
144   4, isn't it, rather than-,so I remember a kid last year who loved business. He adored the
145   lessons, he loved the teacher, and he could come away and have all sorts of chats. When it
146   came to horse-trading, which is a horrible phrase, he-, they decided he was going to drop
147   business because he wasn't going to get the 4, and this kid who, it was, like, his release of
148   the week to just go and sit and talk about business.

149   P5: And so, like, if you're in a situation like that, when [name] comes to being in Year 11 and
150   everyone's saying, 'No, chuck him out.' Like, how would you cope with that?

151   P1: It would be brutal, wouldn't it?

152   P5: It would be so horrible.

153   P1: But, if you look… I think probably if you look at a lot of schools nationally,… the
154   approach with kids who aren't going to get… the 4, is it to, like-,

155   P4: That decision's made quite early isn't it, Year 8 options?

156   P1: Very.

157   P4: Those kids that, say, 'I want to do history'-,

158   P2: They can't.

159   P4: Are we saying, 'I don't think you're suited to it,' which is quite early to make the
160   decision.

161   P1: Yeah.

162   P4: But it's because you're looking at these sorts of things down the line and just thinking-,

163   P2: Mmm.

164   P4: 'Do we want to hedge our bets on this kid?'

165   P2: But then do you want to not put them in for it because it's just going to stress them out
166   and cause more… mental-, I don't know, like, some sort of damage.

167   P1: Mmm.

168   P2: And to give them something that they're going to achieve at, even though it's below the
169   expectations of the school, at least they've achieved it and it's a stepping stone to get to
170   college, or the next school?

171   P1: Yeah, though I think that you can put a lot of onus on a teacher for making it-,… if the
172   way that it is-, if you removed it all, and I don't think you can, in an ideal world you'd
173   remove all the pressure and we would just be, like, 'Go on, have a good time, and teach
174   them, and see where you end up.' That's not possible. But if, if a teacher could have total
175   control over,… just, like, kids- Because you'd get something from it even if it's not an exam,
176   right? Like, you get a story to tell if you've been in a history lesson, you get a character to
177   inspire you. It doesn't have-, but instead we're so led by-,

178   P2: Just because they might not be very good at the exam, doesn't mean they wouldn't pick
179   up all the information and verbally be able to tell it.

180   P1: Mmhmm.

181   P2: And do all that sort of stuff, and actually participate probably a lot better in the class
182   than some other children.

183   P1: Mmhmm.

184   P2: But they just can't answer the exam questions

185   P7: I think the exam-, the way the exams are structured still is just so old-fashioned and
186   people are, have so-, show much better strengths in, as you said, their verbal abilities or-,
187   and then, as they're, they're ranked in a way that they just become a number, and they
188   become lost in their aspirations and their strengths in other ways, just become a number,
189   and that's so-, like, it's not a, a well-rounded picture of them.

190   P6: Yeah…I think also we forget the stress it puts them under.

191   P1: Yeah.

192   P6: 'Cause we feel the stress, we're, like, 'Oh no, it's a borderline group, like, and my
193   Progress 8 could look really bad.' Let us-, but then also, the Progress 8 helps you to
194   measure, like, 'Did I do well by this class? Like, could this class have done better with
195   another teacher? Like, did I fail this class?' as well.

196   P5: It's difficult isn't it?

197 P6: It's tough, it's tough, so, you've got, like, all of this stuff, and actually, it's, like, the child
198 is super-stressed, so I think we forget their stress in our own stress because of all this stuff
199 too.

200 P1: Mmm.

201 P6: But I think it's, like, it's, it's shaped by what comes after school. isn't it?

202 P1: Yeah.

203 P6: Like, we've, we've privileged academic subjects, we don't have, like, a kind of thing
204 outside of thing-, um, school where things that aren't so academic are valued as highly as
205 they should be.

206 P1: Mmm.

207 P6: And I think that just feeds down, I don't know how you change it in the current way we
208 are.

209 P1: Yeah. I agree with that. So, do you remember a few years ago the government… well,
210 they tried to instill all sorts of things, but T levels are the latest thing, have you heard of
211 them?

212 P2: Yes, it's colleges, isn't it?

213 P1: Yeah, and then something very similar came out a few years ago which was, like, the
214 equivalent of what a BTEC is now, and loads of kids did it for a couple of years, and then
215 suddenly they axed it and they got rid of the qualification, and the qualification was no
216 longer considered and it was all vocational stuff. Um, and I don't want to go too political,
217 but the idea was that there was a-, there was an attempt to change the, kind of, education-,
218 educational landscape so that things that were less academic were acknowledged.

219 P6: Mmm.

220 P1: But any time that's, kind of, been happened, kind of, happened, it's been, like, (talking
221 over each other). No. Like, even-, like, with BTECs still, you hear horrible things about… that
222 kind of thing, but it's giving lower-ab, low-attaining students a, a route in, isn't it?

223 P5: It's also the stigma, isn't it?

224 P1: Yes.

225 P2: Lots of parents think, 'BTEC, oh, that's not a GCSE. I'm not having my child to do that.'
226 But it is the equivalent, but they just don't seem to-,

227 P3: But then you get kids that's-, in an A level class that you can identify would actually
228 would be doing better in a BTEC.

229 P1: Yeah.

230 P3: Because they get so unmotivated by continuously receiving E grades.

231 P2: Mmm.

232 P3: Um, and they would-, they would thrive in a, a BTEC environment. And even just
233 yesterday they published a, a new initiative to try and get, um, children who weren't as
234 academic into different routes and they are now offering free vocational courses or
235 something.

236 P2: Mmhmm.

237 P3: So, I guess they're just renaming it and trying again to open up doors, but-, yeah.

238 P1: And actually, if you look at, you know 'cause they are now guided by, what's it called
239 the bacca-,

240 P3: The Ebacc.

241 P1: The Ebacc, and a lot of your data comes from that, right? The school data,

242 P5: Yeah

243 P1: and all of them are more academic subjects. I remember last year when we were doing
244 the SEN data, we were going through all the students and it was, like, 'Right, they don't
245 count towards the Ebacc, don't count towards the Ebacc, don't count towards the Ebacc,'
246 and it was just like,

247 P5: Brutal

248 P1: 'Right, we don't need to talk about them, they don't count towards the Ebacc,' and it
249 was because the, the school is under a pressure because they know their names are going
250 to be published and presented nationally, and if a school that is top of the country, which
251 this was at one point, falls, then they're, like, 'Ahhh, we're not, we're not so good any more,'
252 like.

253 P6: And also, like, schools are like a marketplace, aren't they, so it's, like, you know, if
254 you're higher, then more kids will want to go, you can stay open, like, kids-, schools close,
255 don't they, because they're not-, so, it's, like, it's, kind of, there's, like, a marketplace with
256 different schools-,

257   P1: Yeah, yeah.

258   P6: It's all very based on these very visible markers of success within a school, and-,

259   P1: What's your view on schools advertising themselves? You know, where they let- like
260   SJSSB do it but-, I shouldn't say names, they do it by the road, like, big posters and stuff.

261   P2: Oh, loads of schools do it, don't they, when they've got Ofsted, 'We've got this, this, and
262   however many percentage we've got.'

263   P6: Yeah.

264   P1: Yeah, or, like, schools on the side of buses and stuff like that. It becomes like a
265   corporate world almost, doesn't it?

266   P5: Who pays for that? The school?

267   P6: That's, kind of, what they're aiming for, like, a quasi-market that drives up standards.

268   P2: But then you think, you know, you're dealing with children and they're not-

269   P6: But then you look at these really extreme schools where-,

270   P2: Parents-,

271   P6: -where children, like the XXXX school where they're not allowed to, like, do anything by
272   the sounds of it, they have to sit like this all day, and there are no TAs…. I don't know, it's
273   mad. And, like, people are like, 'But it's an amazing school,' because their results are
274   amazing.

275   P1: Yeah.

276   P6: But then you think, if my child was of low ability, would I want them to go there?

277   P1: Mmm… Yeah. I also, if you look at teaching of low ability-, low-attaining, it sometimes
278   doesn't get the attention that it needs. So, there's-, and I think comes from that feeling of,
279   like, 'I'm not sure these students are going to get it so-,'

280   P5: Less planning goes into it, less thought and consideration.

281   P1: Yeah.

282   P2: And really you should be putting the stronger teachers-,

283   P6: Oh, totally.

284   P2: In there to help them boost their levels, not-, no disrespect to anybody but that would
285   be, like, an NQT or somebody who will get-,

286   P4: Yeah, I mean, we often put non-specialists with really low sets in Year 7, and-,

287   P5: Trainees are always with the-, those sets as well.

288   P4: Just because it's deemed-, yeah, I don't know. It's not easier, is it, but less important, I
289   don't know.

290   P5: Less important, and the stakes are not as high.

291   P1: Yeah.

292   P4: Yeah.

293   P5: So, therefore we can dispose of these periods with this trainee.

294   P1: Mmhmm. I think sometimes it is deemed easier, and I think they think there might be a
295   bit less planning because they move slower.

296   P2: But it's not though, it's more I think, far more. Far more.

297   P3: I struggle with that because I know how much I should be doing for my low sets,
298   because I teach bottom set 8 and bottom set 7, and I know how much planning it requires
299   yet do not have the capacity to do it. And my capacity is put into A level because if I didn't
300   meet those Alps3 targets, which is on my performance management-,

301   P1: Yeah.

302   P3: Which is not going to happen anyway, um, then I mean, that's, that's where I'm held to
303   account, um, and that makes me feel awful because those kids aren't getting the lessons
304   that could actually-, they could enjoy for one, and learn something from them.

305   P1: Mmm.

306   P7: I think also, like, it's easy to forget Year 7, you're so impressionable, you're very
307   malleable, you're so young, there's a lot of room to um mould Year 7. Year 11 are maybe a
308   bit more-, you're older, you're matured, you're a bit more stuck in your ways (talking over
309   each other).

310   P6: Matured (laughter) (talking over each other).

311   P7: ( ) Year 7 is such an important year, because lower set Year 7, and they were just like-,
312   it's not like a-, yeah ( )

313   P1: Because there was just so much pressure everywhere else, right?

314   P7: Yeah.

315   P1: What would you do instead of GCSEs then? Would you bring back coursework?

316   P6: A little folder, a little folder of things.

317   P1: (laughing and in a high pitched voice) A little folder of work.

318   P6: A little pride folder.

319   P1: (laughing) Do a portfolio.

320   P6: Little portfolio of proud things.

321   P1: Because coursework was a chance for low-attaining students, right?

322   P5: Yeah.

323   P2: It was also a chance for cheating, bad, bad cheating.

324   P1: Would you bring it back?

325   P6: I don't know, like, I just don't-, how do you, how do you-

326   P5: was this your first year of teaching?

327   P6: Yeah (talking over each other).

328   P5: Because I wasn't around for that-,

329   P6: I've seen some…..bad things… (talking over each other)

330   P1: I remember sitting like, rewriting, weren't we? We were brought in for intervention
331   days and we'd all just be sat at the computer, like, you know, if you-,

332   P6: Yeah, it's not by them a lot of the time.

333   P1: But, is there an alternative? 'Cause we went from this system whereby there was
334   coursework, there was a lot more support, to this system where now everything is assessed
335   at the end of two or three years of work, and then you've got some students who get to the
336   end of that with no GCSEs. It's, like, 'Well, what was the point of 8, 9 and 11 if all they've
337   been working towards is this that makes them feel like absolute duds?'

338   P2: It needs more,.. all the entry level courses, they've all disappeared. It needs lots more of
339   those put back in as a better second ( )- (talking over each other).

340   P1: But, the thing is alongside that there's got to be credibility as well (talking over each
341   other) so there needs to be a whole shift.

342   P2: Yeah, so then there's still that, um, you know, assessment goes on, that, you know, you
343   know, I've taught those in the past, and you still have to do the assessment, and you have to
344   send it in and they want to see examples of the work, and, you know, you can't just, like,
345   tick, done.

346   P1: Yeah.

347   P2: 'Cause that's almost, that's what people think, that entry courses are, 'Oh, you do a
348   little bit of work, bit of coursework or whatever, you might have a sheet that the teacher
349   signs at the end and you're done,' it's-, yes, it's not-, it's seen as not as rigorous.

350   P1: Yeah.

351   P2: But then there are courses out there that are very rigorous, that they make you fill out
352   all these forms and you have to do witness statements, and you have to, err, then send it in
353   and it has to be moderated externally and then sent back to you.

354   P6: I think as well, like, foundation papers, like, they used to be, didn't there-,

355   P1: True.

356   P6: I don't know about history but with English, like-,

357   P4: English-,

358   P6: They get, like, one question.

359   P1: Do you still have one?

360   P4: No

361   P6: No.

362   P2: It's only maths, isn't it?

363   P6: Zero- and science (talking over each other).

364   P3: That's foundation (talking over each other).

365   P1: And languages have, yeah.

366   (talking over each other)

367   P5: Why is that ( ) English?

368   P6: Do you think it makes a difference?

369   P3: Um, yes, but then the decision to put a kid into a foundation exam is capping them at a
370   5.

371   P6: And do they have to get a very high percentage to get that?

372   P3: Um, but it's easier to get the percentage.

373   P6: Okay.

374   P3: But to make that decision, which I think is quite good, we wait right up until the end of
375   Year 11 to make that call, err, but it's-,

376   P6: That's tough.

377   P3: Yeah, it's tough to decide that actually that kid is not likely to get more than-, it doesn't
378   matter if they don't get more than a 5, um, yeah.

379   P6: They should do it at 7.

380   P3: Mmm.

381   P6: Like 7, you could possibly get a 7

382   (laughter)

383   P3: Or even the fact that we, from Year 7 or 8, as soon as they go into the end of Year 8, we
384   decide whether they can even only just sit physics, so they would only sit a physics exam.

385   P5: Oh, yeah, yeah.

386 P3: There's arguments both side of that as well, but we decide that pretty early, unlike the-,
387 which entries that we, we enter them into the exam, then-,

388 P6: 'Cause the, the low-attaining students are all just put in for physics, aren't they?

389 P3: They're all just put in for physics, they don't do any biology or any chemistry.

390 P1: 'Cause it's the most fun obviously (laughter)

391 P6: Physics is the worst one!

392 P1: Horrible.

393 P6: I'd have thought it would be the other way round (talking over each other).

394 P1: Awful.

395 P6: Go for biology.

396 P3: It needs less literacy… and actually their maths is quite strong so they tend to do better
397 with the physics in this school.

398 P2: So you don't do-, because you do the triple, don't you, and then there, there's a double,
399 but you don't do that?

400 P3: Mmm, well, we do, but then we take, um, those who we don't think will be able to cope
401 with either of those, and we just teach them physics, from quite early on, and they only sit
402 the physics exam.

403 P2: Alright, okay. You see, the previous school I worked at, those children who didn't fit the
404 science did animal care instead.

405 P5: Animal care!

406 P2: Which was absolutely awful, it was one of the worst things I ever taught in my life.

407 P1: That sounds amazing.

408 P5: Was it, like, how to-,

409 (talking over each other)

410 P2: It was really hard, and they had to do about-, so they'd go and visit farms, which was,
411 you know, all very nice and lovely, but then they had to say about parasites and stuff like
412 that, and you're talking about seriously low-attaining kids, 'How would you know about red-
413 eye with a rabbit?' and stuff, and all this, you know.

414 P1: Animal care!

415 (Talking over each other)

416 P5: I thought it was something different – how to stroke them!

417 P6: I thought it would be- (talking over each other)

418 P5: How to pick up a hamster (laughter).

419 P2: No, it's not as nice as it sounds, unfortunately.

420 P6: It does sound really nice.

421 P5: It does.

422 P3: [Participant 1], you probably know, I don't know what Ofsted does to hold schools
423 account for those kids.

424 P1: We got brought into a meeting, it was the year before you joined, so it was with the ( )
425 co-ordinator, and they got us to pull up all our reading age data and quizzed us on what we
426 do to support with that… Um, and then we do like mini-interventions and we had to track all
427 the data and we had to prove that you're making progress.

428 P5: Which is hard.

429 P1: Or they say don't do the intervention.

430 P3: Okay.

431 P5: And it's so impossible to prove-,

432 P3: Yeah.

433 P5: Um, the impact that you're having on the small interventions over time.

434 P1: With kids who've had years and years of intervention, and things haven't improved.

435   P5: Yes. Yeah.

436   P1: It's hard work.

437   P5: It's really hard.

438   P2: Because they might make the tiniest improvement, and it's really hard to see it.

439   P7: Again it's just, that's the, like, fixating on one number, like, there's a set at the
440   beginning, it's not, like, interventions that I've already done where every day or every week
441   it's the same regardless of what you teach, it's-, they're different day by day, but we just
442   fixate on this number, this data, and I think we've really forgotten that it's, like, lots of
443   individual differences and individual daily life.

444   P6: Remember when the Year 9 reading data was really quite bad one year?

445   P1: Yeah.

446   P6: And-, but it was, like, I was thinking about it, it was my class ( ) and I was quite-, I was
447   thinking about, and I was, like, they took the first one, like, in the morning at the start of
448   September when they were fresh, and they were, like, 'Yeah, I'm going to do this, I'm going
449   to really try.' And then they did the second one, like, in a hot afternoon when they were all a
450   bit, like, restless and irritable.

451   P1: The kids with… learning need, you're done for. You can't sit exams in the afternoon.

452   P6: Yeah, or, like, it was at-, a weird time of the day, and, like, they were hot, and they were
453   restless, and they were, like, annoyed that they were doing it, and they were, like, just
454   wanted to go home. And it, like, that's really-, well, they did it in class. The first one they did
455   in, in the exam hall and then the, the second one they did in class on a hot afternoon when
456   we were all really tired of each other. I think in the second part of the double.

457   P1: Oh God.

458   P6: So, it was just, like, of course it's going to be rubbish.

459   P1: And that I think probably is part of the issue with Ofsted, that they, they're not working-
460   , a lot of the time the people who are making these policies don't work in schools, don't
461   teach. I've got a friend who worked at Number 10, um, I'm not-, yeah. And she has never
462   worked in education, she was a civil servant fast-streamer, finished at Oxford, went into the
463   civil service and is now advising on education policy, having never spent-,

464   P2: Ah, but she's been to school though. (sarcastic)

465   P1: -any time in a school. She's been to school.

466   P2: At least she chats to you.

467   P1: True, but-,

468   P5: But you disagree a lot.

469   P1: We disagree all the time.

470   P5: And Maybe that comes from her lack of... actual-,

471   P1: Well, I think, I think the problem is, I think that's a reflection of, kind of, all the people
472   who dictate-..., again, I'm getting political again.

473   P2: Well no, they've all been to grammar school.

474   P1: It's quite a different (talking over each other).

475   P2: Or private school, and it's a totally different environment.

476   P1: Mmm.

477   P2: So they don't understand the low-attaining students at all.

478   P6: Mmm.

479   P1: I think that is the problem. Like, do they know what low-attaining is?

480   P2: No.

481   P3: I'm not sure they do, I would say.

482   P1: No. Any more thoughts? Leila I don't think we have any more thoughts.

483   P3: I have one more. Performance-related pay is always on my top classes, I don't know if
484   anyone else-, my targets are always for my set ones and twos, never are they for my lower
485   sets.

486   P5: Interesting.

487   P3: And I think that sends quite-,

488   P2: Even if you've got a Year 11 lower set?

489   P1: Because you guys have different Year 11 classes, don't you? You have three Year 11
490   classes.

491   P3: Um, I teach 4 and 5, um, but, I mean, all of mine would be on my A level classes, um,
492   and the focus for the department is always on the, kind of, set ones, Year 11.

493   P1: Yeah.

494   P3: Even though they're not necessarily the ones that will meet the biggest change in
495   regards to our Progress 8. But it's, it's never the lower ability, low attaining-,

496   P2: Well, you see, I have because I've always taught that-,

497   P5: Low-ability

498   P2: But then it's been very, very small, they then will make two sub-levels of progress, so-,

499   P3: Then you could just argue that it's Key Stage 3 that's a little bit neglected, I guess it's the
500   exam classes, but-,

501   P6: Super-…neglected… But in a way that's nice because we have so much freedom, like,
502   they have so much freedom to, like, study interesting texts, or, like, take that time and have
503   a nice time.

504   P1: But, do they really, because you're still assessed by data, right? You still do ranking
505   exams twice a year so that we can check that they're going to make the right progress
506   (talking over each other) GCSEs. And if they don't get-, do well in their ranks and they are
507   put into a study club until five o'clock every day.

508   P2: Yeah, and is that really going to help them?

509   P3: And that's interesting, we don't change how much time we will allow for certain parts of
510   the curriculum for our lower set so they have to have covered the same content in the exact
511   same time as our set ones, and I don't know if that's reasonable to-,

512   P2: No, because I did-, realistically when I taught (talking over each other) that it can take
513   me two, three lessons to cover what the top set would cover if I wanted to teach it to them
514   properly, or you'd cut massive chunks out of it, give them the very basics, and next on to the
515   next lesson.

516   P3: Well, that's what-,

517   P2: Or you teach it, they have no understanding of what you taught, and you move onto the
518   next lesson.

519   P1: Yeah,

520   P6: or, like, give them, like, some sentence-starters with some key words in them and they,
521   kind of, mush it together and they have a really lovely paragraph, but they have no real
522   understanding of what they-, what they've done.

523   P2: Yeah. And you have to write, like, stuff all over their books saying, you know, 'work
524   together as a class', or 'group work' or something, so if anybody reads it, they'll look at it
525   and, 'Wow, that's amazing,' but no (laughter). They didn't do it themselves.

526   P1: Anyone? No? Any other thoughts?

527   Moderator: Any last thoughts about how this affects you in the classroom? Or personally?

528   P6: It's, like, makes you more tense as it creeps up and you see those kids, and you're, like,
529   'Oh, I thought you could have got 4 but you've not made the progress that I expected,' and
530   they take that stress on. I've had kids break down in tears… because of this,… and you don't
531   go, 'How are you?' you go, 'Why haven't you started that with a quote?' Do you know what I
532   mean?

533   P5: Yeah. But also, like, last year there was a point when we all photocopied examples of
534   Year 10 literature essays, and we took them to that meeting, and no names but we all left
535   feeling like we were absolutely awful-,

536   P6: Awful teachers, yeah.

537   P5: -teachers, based on the quality of these essays.

538   P6: Yeah (laughter).

539   P5: And again that comes from this, um, the high stakes, and also, um, I'm not going to
540   mention names, but someone keeps trying to put kids in my class (laughter). Like, someone
541   keeps trying to move kids down from four into five, and I think-,

542   P4: I've sometimes been susp-, like, (laughter). Sometimes someone's said 'Oh, I think So-
543   and-so will do really well in your group,'

544   P5: that's always a lie!

545   P4: and then I check SIMS and I'm, like, 'Hmm, hang on a minute, I don't know (laughter), I
546   think he's better off staying where he is,' because I'm, like, just thinking ahead, and I don't
547   know if anyone's playing that game, but, um-,

548   P5: People are playing that game. (laughter) And then, and also they were saying, 'He's
549   really nice.' And he comes in and I'm, like, 'Ugh. You are not nice, and you're really not quite
550   all there.' So, it's very frustrating. And then that's a burden on me.

551   P1: I think, […], the battle that I have in my job, is that I'm torn between wanting to make
552   sure kids are happy, and at school, and not getting angry, and being a nice human being, but
553   there's only so much time that I can spend on that because suddenly the ranks come along,
554   and I'm just scrolling through a rank being, like, 'Why is he not doing well in English? Who
555   cares if he's angry? Sort that out.' And it's, like, you've got these battling priorities, and the,
556   kind of, the moral side of me is, like, 'This is the priority, they need to be kind, good people
557   when they leave and go off into the community,'… but from-, because of this, actually
558   there's not as much time that I can spend on the kind of thing that I'm morally guided to and
559   have to spend time on the thing that-,

560   P6: You're data-guided to.

561   P1: And that up above, even on-, even outside of this school tell me I have to be guided to,
562   because I don't-, the school are just guided by the pressures that come, I think.

563   P6: And then it becomes, like, super stressful, doesn't it?

564   P1: Yeah. And you feel like you're failing people, I think that's the key if you feel like you're
565   failing people.

566   P6: You feel like you're failing these kids, you feel like you're failing the department.

567   P5: That's a lot of pressure.

568   P1: We've had discussions about kids who I know would be better if they went off to
569   college and did a few days-, a few have done it in the past, a few days of college, a few days
570   in school, and then it's, like, 'But what about their results?' And it's, like, alright…, well-,

571   P5: Well, you can't, you can't win every battle.

572   P1: No. And if they go off and can be a nice human being in the world-,

573   P5: Then you're happy.

574   P1: Then I think we've won.

575   P2: Yeah, with some confidence in them, yeah.

576   P1: And just not shout at people in the supermarket, and be able to breathe.

577   P5: That would be nice.

578   P2: Sometimes it's necessary. (laughter)

579   P1: Fabulous. Thank you very much, thank you.

Appendix L: Extract of transcript with 'description' analysis applied

	Experiential value of words and grammar	Relational value of words and grammar	Expressive value of words and grammar	Metaphors used? How are simple sentences linked?	Interactional conventions? Larger scale structures?
P1: Okay. So, I actually-, this'll maybe start the conversation off. I, […], part of my job is to review Year 11 data at the end of-…, after GCSEs, and SEN data has traditionally not been very good. Now, I don't think that that's on account of… individual, kind of, teaching… because I think as individuals we all really care about that. I think probably… it's the fault of… things like this that can hinder progress… and I've got to formulate this thought before I say it… Because if we're thinking about, like with, um,… the league tables and stuff, some of it's based on, like, where kids go next, right? That can dictate how you're doing nationally. It's, like, what kids have got five A*-C, or now 9-4, what kids have gone on to do academic A levels. Kids who may not achieve those 9-4,… do they just, kind of, get overseen because it's, like, 'Well that kid's not going to get near the 4 that-, the 4 that we need,… and so therefore that isn't going to take the energy that, say, this mid set are going to get because it's a good chance that they'll get 4s'? So, are we just so driven by the data at the end, that it can, kind of, mean that kids… lose out?	• "SEN data" – talking about the data, not children • "traditionally" – makes it sound as if this is something that's part of the school, not the individuals in the room • "not been very good" – why not use bad? Trying to soften it. • "individuals" – theres a difference between individuals (good) and the collective (bad) • "kind of" – lots of uncertainty • "overseen" and "lose out" suggests it's accidental rather than purposeful	• "I, […]" – establishing her role and power status but then "we all" to try and become part of the group. • "we're" – generalizing her opinion to everyone? • Changed to "you're" when talking about the school • "we need" • "do they just, kind of, get overseen?" no agency – who is overseeing them?	• P1 is trying to express that SEN children are not doing well. She's trying not to blame teachers but is making the suggestion that less energy is being put into these children which means they're not achieving their potential • Lots of pauses, "kind of"s, "probably"s – being tentative and avoiding certainty.	• "driven by the data" – in the passenger seat – not in control	• Starts off the conversation and reinforcing position– taking control of the conversation. • Do these discourses get taken up? – SEN not brought up again

| P2: Because you're not seeing where they've come from because they could have come from a really low P scale where they can barely write a sentence, and if they manage to get a 2 or a 3, that's a massive achievement-,

P1: Yeah.

P2: But because it's below that cut-off-,

P1: Mmhmm.

P2: They're, sort of,… not necessarily tossed aside, but-,

P1: Mmhmm. | • "really low", "barely write" contrasted with "massive achievement" – extremes on either end
• "not necessarily" – trying to soften blow?
• "tossed aside" a more purposeful act than just being 'overseen' – suggesting it's more deliberate – a conscious decision | • "they're sort of… not necessarily tossed aside" – agency is unclear – who is doing the tossing? | • Almost feels like a conspiracy – data gets passed on from primary schools. There's a suggestion here that their prior attainment was hidden
• "not necessarily tossed aside" – could not think of another way of putting it? It's quite harsh language to say 'not necessarily' to. | • "because" – trying to explain why kids are 'losing out'? | • |

P6: I think, those children's well-being sometimes get left in the dust when we're thinking about that because I think-, P1: Yeah. P6: Personal accountability, school accountability, everyone's worried about their accountability, and actually I think these children feel either that they're not doing enough because they're being told, 'Oh, you should be getting this,' or, 'You could be getting this,' or by-, this is the message they get across the school, and then they feel like even if try hard, what they produce is never good enough because it falls short of those kind of grades that we want them to be getting. Particularly, like, I'm talking about the ones on, like, 2s and 3s-, P1: Yeah, yeah. P6: They could get a 4 if they really, like, smashed it but the-they are so stretched, and I think in all of the, like, ( ), like, teachers' personal concerns about performance-related pay, all of that, the actual child and how they feel, like, the moments of being, like, proud of something, or-, get forgotten a lot. P1: Mmhmm, yeah. P6: And I think that really-, I find that really, really difficult and really upsetting… sometimes.	• The use of "children" rather than "kid" • "personal" used and is never contrasted with "professional" – teachers are referred to as individuals rather than workers in a school system • The term "accountability" was introduced by me – repeated a lot here – adopted very quickly • "forgotten" – going back to the passive • "produce" – production of work rather than learning	• "those children's well being sometimes get left in the dust" – no agency – by who? • "everyone" not "we're all" • "they're being told" not "we're telling them". Creating distance when talking about difficult things? No agency. • "they get across the school" not mentioning from who • "teachers" as if they're a separate group • When talking about emotions, talked about it only in terms of themselves	• "they're being told" – theres a certainty to the way this is said – suggesting this is what's going on. • Term "should" corrected to "could" and then repeated. Suggesting that it is something realistic rather than an unrealistic expectation? • "never good enough" – the word never suggesting a certainty • P6's monologue here shows a lot of passion	• "get left in the dust" – suggesting there's lots of other stuff that's being driven forward • "smashed it" • "so stretched"	•

P1: And I guess also, because what we're constantly working towards is the exam at the end, right? P6: Yeah. P1: How often can you just, like, pause in your practice and be like, 'Let's do something… fun- P6: (*laughs*) P1: -or, like, let's hear your opinions on something'? Like, every lesson's like, 'Right, that's the exam, we've got it in eight months' time, let's go.' And that's because we constantly feel this pressure, right? Group: Mmm. P5: It's horrible	• "exam" contrasted with "fun" and having "opinions"	• "you" claims solidarity – used synonymously with 'we'. More personalized • "every lesson's like" – not mentioning who is saying it • "we've got it in" – collective 'we' suggesting the teacher is taking the exam too	• The suggestion here is that the teachers and students are in the same boat. It feels like a collective experience that they're all going through together.	•	• "right?" – trying to bring the others in.

P2: But then it's also the ones who, I don't know, like the-, like, the weakest ones who… may not score particularly well, however they've learnt how to communicate better with somebody. P1: Mmm. P2: Then they can now have strong, good conversation by saying, you know, 'Good morning, how are you? Der, der, der, der,' but nobody marks them for that. P1: Yeah. P2: But that's-, that could be a massive achievement for them. But, you know, you're not going to get a GCSE in it.	• "ones" not referred to as children or kids. Much more abstract • "weakest" comparative language – those at the bottom of the strength hierarchy • "achievement" – the word suggests something tangible. Again an outcome rather than necessarily learning.	• "nobody" rather than "we're not"	•	•	•
P1: Does it get spotted by Ofsted though? P2: I think if they came round, you'd like to think that they would. P1: I guess Ofsted don't see progress, but I think they do see care. P2: Hmm. P1: I think… P2: More so now than they used to, I think.	• "care" being seen as having value • "I think" – avoiding definitive statements, always tentative especially if suggesting something positive about ofsted	• "they" of Ofsted seems a bit ominous. Only p1 actually refers to them as Ofsted – everyone else says 'they'	• "ofsted don't see progress" – is very fatalistic.	•	• P1 tries to say something positive about Ofsted and it doesn't get taken up. Met with a 'hmm' and then it becomes even more tentative with a repetition of 'I think'

P1: Right. See, I, I-, my, this is, like, my sixth year, so my only experience of Ofsted was here. P2: Yeah. P1: As a SENCo, and so I guess the role that I played in that-, P2: But it's still data-driven though, isn't it? P6: Yeah. P2: They still want to see- P1: But we also had a lot of chat about-, yeah, true, yeah, it's data-driven.	• "role" in contrast to the suggestion of 'personal' earlier – this is specifically a professional position she played in the process. Trying to distance herself	• Difficulty talking about these things as an individual – stuttering over "I" and then going back to her role as "SENCo" • "yeah, true, yeah" – don't want to seem as if on Ofsted side?	• Trying to find the good – is this an example of the "battle" as a SENCo? Trying to take both sides? – being a senco without being SLT?	• "data driven" – idea of being led, not being in control	• P1 gets interrupted and cut off before she's made her point. It seemed like she was going to say something positive and wasn't allowed to. Then gives in to their discourse of 'data-driven'
P6: Because, like, they'll come in-, P1: Always. P6: With their data and have made up their minds because, like, a lot I think because of the data. P2: But they can see some progress. Because that's what they always want to see, isn't it, some progress, but if you can-,	• "data" vs "progress" – being used as if they are separate things. Ofsted see data but not progress? But the point of data is to measure progress.	•	• "they'll come in" feels like an invasion • "their data" although the data is the school's data	•	• Gets cut off after trying to show some positivity towards ofsted

Appendix M: Extract of transcript with 'interpretation' analysis applied

	Meaning of utterance – assigning meaning according to my members' resources	Local coherence – making connections between utterances to produce interpretation of sequences of texts	Presuppositions and negations
P1: Can I just ask one question? The school you said would all be anonymous. **Moderator: Yes, absolutely anonymous.**	Concerns/fear about repercussions? Anticipating speaking negatively about the school?		
P1: Okay. So, I actually-, this'll maybe start the conversation off. I, as SENCo, part of my job is to review Year 11 data at the end of-…, after GCSEs, and SEN data has traditionally not been very good. Now, I don't think that that's on account of… individual, kind of, teaching… because I think as individuals we all really care about that. I think probably… it's the fault of… things like this that can hinder progress… and I've got to formulate this thought before I say it… Because if we're thinking about, like with, um,… the league tables and stuff, some of it's based on, like, where kids go next, right? That can dictate how you're doing nationally. It's, like, what kids have got five A*-C, or now 9-4, what kids have gone on to do academic A levels. Kids who may not achieve those 9-4,… do they just, kind of, get overseen because it's, like, 'Well that kid's not going to get near the 4 that-, the 4 that we need,… and so therefore that isn't going to take the energy that, say, this mid set are going to get because it's		Believes that children who achieve below a 4 are overseen, and this includes children with SEN. Believes that this is due to accountability measures not allowing teachers to care.	Presupposition that teachers care about SEN and that it's not their fault they're not doing well.

	Meaning of utterance – assigning meaning according to my members' resources	Local coherence – making connections between utterances to produce interpretation of sequences of texts	Presuppositions and negations
a good chance that they'll get 4s'? So, are we just so driven by the data at the end, that it can, kind of, mean that kids… lose out?			
P2: Because you're not seeing where they've come from because they could have come from a really low P scale where they can barely write a sentence, and if they manage to get a 2 or a 3, that's a massive achievement-, P1: Yeah. P2: But because it's below that cut-off-, P1: Mmhmm. P2: They're, sort of,… not necessarily tossed aside, but-, P1: Mmhmm.		Children's attainment is largely dictated by previous achievement. Schools are not interested in low attainers from the beginning as their progress isn't good enough.	Presupposition that low attaining students are unable to do well Presupposition that there is a certain level of attainment that is cared about – didn't label what that level is – it is assumed they're all working off the same level?

	Meaning of utterance – assigning meaning according to my members' resources	Local coherence – making connections between utterances to produce interpretation of sequences of texts	Presuppositions and negations
P6: I think, those children's well-being sometimes get left in the dust when we're thinking about that because I think-, P1: Yeah. P6: Personal accountability, school accountability, everyone's worried about their accountability, and actually I think these children feel either that they're not doing enough because they're being told, 'Oh, you should be getting this,' or, 'You could be getting this,' or by-, this is the message they get across the school, and then they feel like even if try hard, what they produce is never good enough because it falls short of those kind of grades that we want them to be getting. Particularly, like, I'm talking about the ones on, like, 2s and 3s-, P1: Yeah, yeah. P6: They could get a 4 if they really, like, smashed it but the-they are so stretched, and I think in all of the, like, ( ), like, teachers' personal concerns about performance-related pay, all of that, the actual child and how they feel, like, the moments of being, like, proud of something, or-, get forgotten a lot.		Children's well being is suffering due to accountability pressures. This is being passed down to children with expectations of a minimum grade they should be achieving. This expectation is not realistic for some. What they do achieve is not being acknowledged.	Presupposition that grades and expectations are bad for children's wellbeing Presupposition that there is a particular grade that they need and anything below isn't good enough

	Meaning of utterance – assigning meaning according to my members' resources	Local coherence – making connections between utterances to produce interpretation of sequences of texts	Presuppositions and negations
P1: Mmhmm, yeah. P6: And I think that really-, I find that really, really difficult and really upsetting… sometimes.			

	Meaning of utterance – assigning meaning according to my members' resources	Local coherence – making connections between utterances to produce interpretation of sequences of texts	Presuppositions and negations
P1: And I guess also, because what we're constantly working towards is the exam at the end, right? P6: Yeah. P1: How often can you just, like, pause in your practice and be like, 'Let's do something… fun- P6: *laughs* P1: -or, like, let's hear your opinions on something'? Like, every lesson's like, 'Right, that's the exam, we've got it in eight months' time, let's go.' And that's because we constantly feel this pressure, right? Group: Mmm. P5: It's horrible		Pressure from exams influences teaching practice	Exams are the only important outcome Exams aren't fun. Exam's don't allow for opinions. The way teachers are required to teach isn't the way they want to teach

	Meaning of utterance – assigning meaning according to my members' resources	Local coherence – making connections between utterances to produce interpretation of sequences of texts	Presuppositions and negations
P2: But then it's also the ones who, I don't know, like the-, like, the weakest ones who… may not score particularly well, however they've learnt how to communicate better with somebody. P1: Mmm. P2: Then they can now have strong, good conversation by saying, you know, 'Good morning, how are you? Der, der, der, der,' but nobody marks them for that. P1: Yeah. P2: But that's-, that could be a massive achievement for them. But, you know, you're not going to get a GCSE in it.		Children make progress in schools in non academic ways, which is beneficial to their lives, but do not get recognized as there is no qualifications	If you don't get a GCSE for something, it's not recognized or worthwhile
P1: Does it get spotted by Ofsted though? P2: I think if they came round, you'd like to think that they would. P1: I guess Ofsted don't see progress, but I think they do see care. P2: Hmm. P1: I think…		Ofsted miss progress in non-academic areas but potentially see when a school cares	Ofsted don't see progress

	Meaning of utterance – assigning meaning according to my members' resources	Local coherence – making connections between utterances to produce interpretation of sequences of texts	Presuppositions and negations
P2: More so now than they used to, I think.			
P1: Right. See, I, I-, my, this is, like, my sixth year, so my only experience of Ofsted was here. P2: Yeah. P1: As a SENCo, and so I guess the role that I played in that-, P2: But it's still data-driven though, isn't it? P6: Yeah. P2: They still want to see. P1: But we also had a lot of chat about-, yeah, true, yeah, it's data-driven.		Ofsted are mainly driven by data	Ofsted mainly care about data

	Meaning of utterance – assigning meaning according to my members' resources	Local coherence – making connections between utterances to produce interpretation of sequences of texts	Presuppositions and negations
P6: Because, like, they'll come in-, P1: Always. P6: With their data and have made up their minds because, like, a lot I think because of the data. P2: But they can see some progress. Because that's what they always want to see, isn't it, some progress, but if you can-,		Back and forth as to whether or not Ofsted look at more than data	Ofsted have made up their minds before coming into the school based on data

Appendix N: Notes of discursive themes for each research question

Discourses around accountability measures	• DATA – how is this word used? What is the meaning behind it? How is it represented? • Binary positions – "battle" • What is the ideal standard of learning and performance being alluded to? "academic"? what does this mean? "rigorous", "progress", "little folder of work" • Contradiction in terms of Teachers views: e.g. caring about progress, but then Progress 8 seen as not as important as Ebacc? Thinking there should be more vocational, but then Ebacc • Gambling • Competition and ranking • Stress
Discourses around low attaining students	• Language used to describe children "kids" "children" "ones" "those" • Language used to describe low attainers "low ability" "not as academic" • The relational language used when it comes to teaching low attaining students – avoidance of including an actor (in a grammatical sense) e.g. "because it's deemed…" – lack of agency when talking about low attaining students • Language around the work that they're doing "little" "nice" • The use of numbers to describe children "4 and 5" (sets) • Words used about what they can and can't do – very definitive. • There is a limit to what they can achieve
How do the discourses uphold/challenge the structures in place	• The concept of not having a choice - "have to" "freedom" • Passive vs Active – kids "forgotten" or "tossed aside"? • Use of relational language: Collective non personal terms when talking about the negative impacts of accountability measures that they are complicit with "everyone" "they're being told" (grammatical structure taking out the actor) but personal terms used when talking about what they want to do to challenge the system "we" "you" • How is the power described? "up above", "feeds down" "they" • "learning" not discussed – grades are discussed • Although there are mostly negative views towards accountability measures, there is little to show that they are working against it • What's NOT being said – often unable to finish sentences. • Teachers seem to be holding two contrasting ideologies at any one time

Appendix O: Example of the refinement process for the dominant discourses

Accountability measures requires competition and game playing

- The initial themes that emerged included 'gambling', 'competition' and 'ranking'.
- I placed the relevant quotes under this heading and began writing up and refining my analysis

Accountability measures introduce market forces

- Whilst writing up the analysis, it became clear that the competition and gameplaying was due to the conceptualisation of the school 'market'. The discourses were very similar to that of business language.

The school system operates as a market place

- I became aware that the teachers themselves didn't make the direct link between accountability measures and market forces, and that this had come from my own conceptualisation of the cause of this language. I decided to remove the 'cause' from the discourse, and used 'market place' as this was language that came from the participant

Pupils are tradeable goods

- When talking to my 'disinterested peers', and reviewing my analysis, we discussed the 'schools as a marketplace' discourse as being unsurprising and inevitable. It is conscious, neoliberal policy to introduce market forces. What was 'new' and 'surprising' from my analysis is where these forces positioned the pupils. It was decided that the dominant discourse was about the pupils themselves being traded, rather than the school

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Appendix P: Extract of transcript with reflexive notes

	Link to self/background	Emotional response	Intellectual response
P1: Can I just ask one question? The school you said would all be anonymous. **Moderator: Yes, absolutely anonymous.**	Unsurprised about this reaction – related to the fear of criticizing school practice	Excited about what she was going to say – assumption that it was going to be 'juicy'	Linking back to my literature review and the subtheme of 'fear'
P1: Okay. So, I actually-, this'll maybe start the conversation off. I, as SENCo, part of my job is to review Year 11 data at the end of-…, after GCSEs, and SEN data has traditionally not been very good. Now, I don't think that that's on account of… individual, kind of, teaching… because I think as individuals we all really care about that. I think probably… it's the fault of… things like this that can hinder progress… and I've got to formulate this thought before I say it… Because if we're thinking about, like with, um,… the league tables and stuff, some of it's based on, like, where kids go next, right? That can dictate how you're doing nationally. It's, like, what kids have got five A*-C, or now 9-4, what kids have gone on to do academic A levels. Kids who may not achieve those 9-4,… do they just, kind of, get overseen because it's, like, 'Well that kid's not going to get near the 4 that-, the 4 that we need,… and so therefore that isn't going to take the energy that, say, this mid set are going to get because it's a good chance that they'll get 4s'? So, are we just so driven by the data at the end, that it can, kind of, mean that kids… lose out?	I felt a connection to this point as it's how I felt towards teaching – the idea that as a teacher I had to follow the data which I knew was at the expense of some children, but found it incredibly difficult to admit that.	The hesitations, stutterings and carefulness of her words made me feel sympathy and warmth towards her. I also felt guilt that I had done exactly what she described as a teacher.	Felt that her naming her position as SENCO at the beginning was to help establish that power, but then the uncertainty with which she made her point showed her difficulty in taking up that role. Or perhaps guilt?

	Link to self/background	Emotional response	Intellectual response
P2: Because you're not seeing where they've come from because they could have come from a really low P scale where they can barely write a sentence, and if they manage to get a 2 or a 3, that's a massive achievement-, P1: Yeah. P2: But because it's below that cut-off-, P1: Mmhmm. P2: They're, sort of,… not necessarily tossed aside, but-, P1: Mmhmm.	I remembered using the fact that students came to me as 'low ability' and blaming previous teachers and schools for their low achievement, thinking that the damage was done and there was little I could do. It's difficult to remember that.	The term 'tossed aside' made me feel immense sadness. The caveat of 'not necessarily' I felt was there to soften the blow but we all knew it was the reality	I thought that P2 brought up the fact that children come 'really low' as a defense mechanism – it's not necessarily the fault of the school or teachers

	Link to self/background	Emotional response	Intellectual response
P6: I think, those children's well-being sometimes get left in the dust when we're thinking about that because I think-, P1: Yeah. P6: Personal accountability, school accountability, everyone's worried about their accountability, and actually I think these children feel either that they're not doing enough because they're being told, 'Oh, you should be getting this,' or, 'You could be getting this,' or by-, this is the message they get across the school, and then they feel like even if try hard, what they produce is never good enough because it falls short of those kind of grades that we want them to be getting. Particularly, like, I'm talking about the ones on, like, 2s and 3s-, P1: Yeah, yeah. P6: They could get a 4 if they really, like, smashed it but the-they are so stretched, and I think in all of the, like, ( ), like, teachers' personal concerns about performance-related pay, all of that, the actual child and how they feel, like, the moments of being, like, proud of something, or-, get forgotten a lot. P1: Mmhmm, yeah. P6: And I think that really-, I find that really, really difficult and really upsetting… sometimes.	The repetition of 'accountability' reminded me of the feeling of being constantly watched and monitored in teaching – from data monitoring, to 'no notice observations' and even glass walls.	This was difficult to listen to and to read. Feelings of hopelessness, both for teachers and for the children. The idea of children feeling 'never good enough' is extremely difficult.	I found it interesting that 'accountability' and student 'wellbeing' were being described as incongruent. Accountability has nothing to do with how the children are actually doing.

	Link to self/background	Emotional response	Intellectual response
P1: And I guess also, because what we're constantly working towards is the exam at the end, right? P6: Yeah. P1: How often can you just, like, pause in your practice and be like, 'Let's do something… fun- P6: *laughs* P1: -or, like, let's hear your opinions on something'? Like, every lesson's like, 'Right, that's the exam, we've got it in eight months' time, let's go.' And that's because we constantly feel this pressure, right? Group: Mmm. P5: It's horrible	Again, exam pressure is something I could relate to, and passing that pressure onto the children is something I both did and regret	This felt sad. From the laughter in response to having fun and P5's contribution (the first they spoke) of 'it's horrible'	The fact that the suggestion of having fun elicited a laugh speaks volumes in terms of the state of secondary school education

	Link to self/background	Emotional response	Intellectual response
P2: But then it's also the ones who, I don't know, like the-, like, the weakest ones who… may not score particularly well, however they've learnt how to communicate better with somebody. P1: Mmm. P2: Then they can now have strong, good conversation by saying, you know, 'Good morning, how are you? Der, der, der, der,' but nobody marks them for that. P1: Yeah. P2: But that's-, that could be a massive achievement for them. But, you know, you're not going to get a GCSE in it.			
P1: Does it get spotted by Ofsted though? P2: I think if they came round, you'd like to think that they would. P1: I guess Ofsted don't see progress, but I think they do see care. P2: Hmm. P1: I think… P2: More so now than they used to, I think.	I've had experience of two Ofsted inspections in two different schools and found it wholly negative. I instantly rejected the idea that they saw care, but realise that was my personal experience	The mention of Ofsted elicited a feeling of anger in me	It was interesting how P1 was trying to say something positive about Ofsted but due to the frosty reaction, felt the need to caveat it with 'I think…'

	Link to self/background	Emotional response	Intellectual response
P1: Right. See, I, I-, my, this is, like, my sixth year, so my only experience of Ofsted was here. P2: Yeah. P1: As a SENCo, and so I guess the role that I played in that-, P2: But it's still data-driven though, isn't it? P6: Yeah. P2: They still want to see. P1: But we also had a lot of chat about-, yeah, true, yeah, it's data-driven.	This exchange made me think about the negativity that can exist in teaching and how it can create a toxic environment. I remembered being idealistic as a new teacher and how the complaining from those more experienced quickly coloured my view	I felt sad for P1 who was trying to see some good in what was being done and her role in it and how she circled back round to accepting the view that it's all purely data driven	I thought about splitting and how P1 was trying to work in a depressive position but was coaxed into a paranoid-schizoid position of Ofsted is completely data driven, and that is wholly bad.
P6: Because, like, they'll come in-, P1: Always. P6: With their data and have made up their minds because, like, a lot I think because of the data. P2: But they can see some progress. Because that's what they always want to see, isn't it, some progress, but if you can-,	Reminded me of the conspiracy theories surrounding Ofsted that went around whilst I was teaching. This was especially the case when I worked in a school that was frequently visited by Michael Gove as part of his academy initiative, and the idea that we only got Outstanding due to his influence		

	Link to self/background	Emotional response	Intellectual response
P6: But I'm not saying there shouldn't be accountability, because there should, like, 'cause kids can get a really bad deal if there is no accountability, like, there needs to be accountability. P1: True. P6: But I think there are, like, particularly low-attaining that suffer from this model.			It was good to see that P6 was able to bring it back to a depressive position, despite negative conversations that were happening.
P1: Mmm. …Is the-, but is the performance pay, P4, you might-, in my time here I don't think that my pay has only gone up based on results. P4: No, it's not the be-all and end-all, I don't think. P1: No. P4: There's other things that are taken into consideration.		I felt frustrated that the last point wasn't allowed to linger and be explored.	I wondered why P1 moved the conversation away from Ofsted at this point. It felt like a useful conversation could have begun and it was stifled.

Appendix Q: Ethics application form

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

This application should be submitted alongside copies of any supporting documentation which will be handed to participants, including a participant information sheet, consent form, self-completion survey or questionnaire.

Where a form is submitted and sections are incomplete, the form will not be considered by TREC and will be returned to the applicant for completion.

For further guidance please contact Paru Jeram (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

SECTION A: PROJECT DETAILS

Project title	Teacher Accountability Measures and Low Attaining Students, A Critical Discourse Analysis.		
Proposed project start date	June 2020	**Anticipated project end date**	May 2021

SECTION B: APPLICANT DETAILS

Name of Researcher	Leila Yahyaoui
Email address	lyahyaoui@tavi-port.nhs.uk
Contact telephone number	07961646683

SECTION C: CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Will any of the researchers or their institutions receive any other benefits or incentives for taking part in this research over and above their normal salary package or the costs of undertaking the research?   YES ☐   NO ☒   If **YES**, please detail below:
Is there any further possibility for conflict of interest? YES ☐   NO ☒   If **YES**, please detail below:

FOR ALL APPLICANTS

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'Is your research being commissioned by and or carried out on behalf of a body external to the trust? (for example; commissioned by a local authority, school, care home, other NHS Trust or other organisation). *Please note that 'external' is defined as an organisation which is external to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust (Trust)	YES ☐ NO ☒ NA ☐
If **YES**, please supply details below:	
Has external* ethics approval been sought for this research? **(i.e. submission via Integrated Research Application System (IRAS) to the Health Research Authority (HRA) or other external research ethics committee)** *Please note that 'external' is defined as an organisation/body which is external to the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) If **YES**, please supply details of the ethical approval bodies below **AND** include any letters of approval from the ethical approval bodies:	YES ☐ NO ☒
If your research is being undertaken externally to the Trust, please provide details of the sponsor of your research?	
Do you have local approval (this includes R&D approval)?	YES ☒ NO ☐ NA ☐ (see email from Principal Education Psychologist in Appendix)

SECTION D: SIGNATURES AND DECLARATIONS

APPLICANT DECLARATION I confirm that: • The information contained in this application is, to the best of my knowledge, correct and up to date. • I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research. • I acknowledge my obligations and commitment to upholding our University's Code of Practice for ethical research and observing the rights of the participants. • I am aware that cases of proven misconduct, in line with our University's policies, may result in formal disciplinary proceedings and/or the cancellation of the proposed research.	
Applicant (print name)	LEILA YAHYAOUI
Signed	
Date	15/05/20

FOR RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENT APPLICANTS ONLY

Name of Supervisor	Judith Mortell
Qualification for which research is being undertaken	Professional Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology

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Supervisor –
- Does the student have the necessary skills to carry out the research?
  YES ☒   **NO** ☐
- Is the participant information sheet, consent form and any other documentation appropriate?
  YES ☒   **NO** ☐
- Are the procedures for recruitment of participants and obtaining informed consent suitable and sufficient?
  YES ☒   **NO** ☐
- Where required, does the researcher have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance?
  YES ☒   **NO** ☐

Signed	
Date	14.02.20

COURSE LEAD/RESEARCH LEAD
- Does the proposed research as detailed herein have your support to proceed?
  YES ☒   **NO** ☐

Signed	
Date	14.02.2020

SECTION E: DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

> 1. **Provide a brief description of the proposed research, including the requirements of participants. This must be in lay terms and free from technical or discipline specific terminology or jargon. If such terms are required, please ensure they are adequately explained (Do not exceed 500 words)**

This research will consider GCSE teachers' discourses about low-attaining students in relation to accountability measures as set out by education policy.

I intend to recruit between six and twelve year 11 teachers from one state maintained secondary school. Participants will attend a focus group that will last 60-90 minutes, to discuss low attaining students and accountability measures. The focus group is intended to take place in person, located within the school, However, if school closures continue and an in-person group is unable to take place by 1st October 2020, it will be conducted and recorded via Zoom.

The focus group will be audio recorded, transcribed and then analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA functions on the understanding that discourses are a relatively stable use of language that organises and structures social life (Wodak & Meyer, 2016) and social life is built through power hierarchies in a socio-economic system "built upon the domination, exploitation and dehumanisation of people by people" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 304). CDA researchers are interested in the way discourse produces and reproduces social domination by one group over others, and how dominated groups may discursively resist such abuse (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). CDA suggests that the discourses that take place between individuals are related to the situations, institutions and social structures that frame them (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997). In this study, the conversations that occur between teachers regarding low-attaining students will be considered in relation to the present time and situation, the specific school's environment, and current education policy.

Discourses within society help to either sustain or potentially transform the social status quo and unequal power relations (Wodak & Fairclough, 1997) and thus can have a direct impact on the way low-attaining GCSE students are viewed and treated in schools governed by results-focused

oversight. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs are critical to ensure the success of inclusive practices in schools (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002), with Reid and Valle (2004) proposing that what individuals think, influences what they do. Therefore, it is essential that these power relations are understood in a bid to truly raise standards for all students.

Current education policy measures school success through a variety of accountability measures, which largely revolve around the academic attainment of students as measured by high-stakes testing (Hutchings, 2015; Leckie & Goldstein, 2016). Schools are held accountable by league tables (Department for Education [DfE], 2019a) and Ofsted inspections (DfE, 1992). Teachers are individually held accountable through Performance Related Pay (DfE, 2019b)

These measures are heavily reliant on students receiving pass marks. Teachers of Y11 students are aware that some students are unlikely to achieve a pass mark despite their intervention whilst other could tip over in to a pass, or a higher grade boundary if they focus their attention on them. By placing attention strategically on certain students, they can potentially increase their pay, delay an Ofsted inspection and improve the school's league table positioning. I am interested in exploring discourses around this and how the discourses uphold and/or challenge the structures in place that enable the system.

2.	**Provide a statement on the aims and significance of the proposed research, including potential impact to knowledge and understanding in the field (where appropriate, indicate the associated hypothesis which will be tested). This should be a clear justification of the proposed research, why it should proceed and a statement on any anticipated benefits to the community. (Do not exceed 700 words)**

This research will consider GCSE teachers' discourses about low-attaining students in relation to accountability measures as set out by education policy, and will explore whether these discourses uphold or challenge the system.

Much of the research within educational psychology attempts to exist within an educational vacuum, leading to calls for practitioners to think more critically about the impact of society, power and politics (Williams, Billington, Goodley, & Corcoran, 2017). This research hopes to highlight that politics plays a role in educational psychologists' (EPs) work, and in the work of all those working in schools. It hopes to encourage EPs to think critically about policy and power.

Specifically, this research hopes to give a snapshot of how the power hierarchies within education policy affect GCSE teachers' discourses regarding low-attaining students. This insight is important to EPs as they work closely with teachers to support children with additional needs. These discourses are powerful in influencing how these students are seen and treated. The power demands on teachers are significant, which EPs should be mindful of.

Current accountability measures largely revolve around the academic attainment of students as measured by high-stakes testing (Hutchings, 2015; Leckie & Goldstein, 2016). Year 11 teachers are held to account by 3 main accountability measures:
- League tables: hold schools accountable for their national test results through a ranking system, as measured by Progress 8 (DfE, 2019a).
- Ofsted inspections: Schools are inspected by Ofsted who provide a rating on a 4-point scale: 1 (Outstanding), 2 (Good), 3 (requires improvement) and 4 (Inadequate). Their rating decides how frequent subsequent inspections will be. If a school is judged as a 3 or 4, they are at risk of being put under 'special measures' which can lead to forced takeover of the school (Ofsted, 2013).
- Performance Related Pay: schools must annually consider whether or not to increase the salary of teachers and this decision must be related to the teacher's performance (DfE, 2019a; Sharp et al, 2017).

Historically, despite well-meaning intentions, political visions have not served all sections of the population equally well. Education policy in particular is designed to enact specific ideals of desirable student outcomes (Reid & Valle, 2004).) Therefore, educational decisions, policies and

social practices often have unintended consequences that lead to further oppression of certain groups (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui & Joseph, 2005), such as low-attaining groups. Low-attainment sets have been found to mainly comprise of students from a low socio-economic background, and students with special educational needs (SEN; Dunne et al, 2007; Mazenod et al., 2018) . Therefore, schools in economically deprived areas and with high levels of SEN appear lower on league tables and are more likely to be judged as 'inadequate' by Ofsted (Gill, 2018). Teachers of these students are also at risk of not being able to increase their rate of pay. Therefore, current accountability measures position low-attaining students as a threat to the perceived success and financial status of teachers and schools.

There have already been some suggestions in research that there is a link between accountability measures and the way teachers subsequently view low-attaining students. Ellins and Porter (2005) found that teachers of non-core subjects had more favourable attitudes towards students with SEN than teachers of core subjects, with the author suggesting that this could be due to the differing levels of pressure on the two groups of teachers. Nicholl and McLellan's (2008) research highlighted one teacher's dilemma in terms of entering low-attaining students into public examinations. They were morally conflicted between allowing the child to achieve a grade and the ramifications of league table data and performance related pay. Low ability children were also seen by a teacher in Forrester's (2005) research as a challenge to her self-worth. Low ability students were also described as a threat to a school's worth, with schools feeling they are 'punished' for taking in recently arrived migrant pupils who will achieve low grades, relative to schools serving economically advantaged areas (Winter, 2007).

This research hopes to:
3. explore the discourses around accountability measures and low-attaining students
4. explore how the discourses uphold and/or challenge the structures in place that enable the system.

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3. Provide an outline of the methodology for the proposed research, including proposed method of data collection, *tasks* assigned to participants of the research and the proposed method and duration of data analysis. If the proposed research makes use of pre-established and generally accepted techniques, please make this clear. (Do not exceed 500 words)

The research will adopt a relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology.

Year 11 teachers who meet the inclusion criteria will be invited to attend a focus group. The focus group will follow the approach as outlined by Denscombe (2010), in which there will be three distinctive characteristics:

- The Focus: The focus group will revolve around a stimulus introduced by the moderator. For the purposes of this study, this will be a short paragraph read out (see appendix A for an example of the stimulus)
- Group Interaction: The group will then be encouraged to discuss the topic amongst themselves. The discussion can either lead to some consensus amongst the group members or it might expose significant differences. Either way, the interaction between the group members is given importance rather than simply gathering multiple opinions.
- The Role of the Moderator: The moderator will, for the most part, stand back and let the group talk amongst themselves. Their aim will be to help the group rather than lead it. The moderator may intervene in order to keep the discussion on track, encourage participation from all members and/or ensure there is no abuse or intimidation.

The focus group will take place within the school that participants work in. It will take place after the school day finishes, in a quiet room where there will be no interruptions. An audio recording will be taken on 2 separate devices as a precautionary measure. If both recordings are successful, one will be deleted instantly.

If school closures continue and an in-person focus group is not able to take place by the 1st October 2020, it will be conducted and recorded via Zoom.

The focus group recording will then be transcribed using a transcribing service. The service will be required to sign a contract of confidentiality. Once the transcription has been verified by myself for accuracy, it will then be analysed using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with a Marxist lens. The audio recording will be deleted upon completion of the analysis.

The Marxist lens of CDA takes into account that capitalist societies like Britain are dominated by a ruling-class. The analysis of power and class relations are significant in how discourses allow power to be established, maintained, and altered (Fairclough, 2010). This is important in the context of this research as schools and teachers are currently heavily monitored by extensive accountability measures set by the 'dominant class' to reduce the amount of low-attaining students (categorising them as the bottom of the class hierarchy).

To analyse the transcripts, Fairclough's (2015) three-dimensional framework will be used. The teachers' discussions will first be analysed at the micro-level, looking at the vocabulary, grammar and textual structures to form a description of the text. It will then be analysed at the meso-level, which is an interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, seeking meanings from the description. Finally, it will be analysed at the macro-level, which seeks an explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context and the implications for social practice.

It is anticipated that the data analysis will be conducted over a period of 2-3 months following the completion of the focus group.

SECTION F: PARTICIPANT DETAILS

4. Provide an explanation detailing how you will identify, approach and recruit the participants for the proposed research, including clarification on sample size and location. Please provide justification for the exclusion/inclusion criteria for this study (i.e. who will be allowed to / not allowed to participate) and explain briefly, in lay terms, why this criteria is in place. (Do not exceed 500 words)

A sample of six to twelve teachers will be recruited from the Local Authority I am currently placed in as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. The sample size was chosen due to guidance stating that the optimum number for a focus group is 6-12 individuals, to capitalize on group dynamics and stimulate discussion without being unmanageable (Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley & McKenna, 2017). The focus group will be conducted within the school that they work.

The teachers will be recruited from the same school due the important assumption within CDA that states discourses can only be understood with reference to their context (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Its primary focus is not on individuals but on social relations (Fairclough, 2010).

I intend to recruit participants by first contacting the head teachers of secondary schools within the local authority. My recruitment plan is as follows:
- Contact the head teacher of secondary schools by email to describe the research and to gain consent to recruit teachers within their school. Within the initial correspondence, the head teachers will be informed that participation will be dependent on a 'first come, first serve' basis.
- Meet with the head teacher in person to describe the research (if requested)
- An information sheet (see appendix) will be forwarded to the year 11 teachers within the school
- Teachers will be asked to contact me directly if they wish to take part
- Participants will be required to sign a consent form prior to the focus group taking place

- If less than 6 teachers offer to take part, the head teacher will be informed that I will not be able to conduct the study in their school, and another school will be contacted. This information will be made explicit within the initial correspondence.

The inclusion criteria for the sample is as follows:
- Teachers will all work in the same state maintained school (state, academy or free school). This is because independent schools are not subject to the same accountability measures as state maintained schools.
- Teachers will have taught year 11 for at least one year in their current school, to ensure they have significant experience within that school context
- At least 20% of the teacher's timetable will be made up of year 11 lessons, to ensure they have significant experience teaching year 11
- Teachers must be on the main pay scale and not hold leadership responsibilities, to ensure the teachers within the focus group are of the same power hierarchy

5. Will the participants be from any of the following groups?*(Tick as appropriate)*

☐ Students or staff of the Trust or the University.
☒ Adults (over the age of 18 years with mental capacity to give consent to participate in the research).
☐ Children or legal minors (anyone under the age of 16 years)[1]
☐ Adults who are unconscious, severely ill or have a terminal illness.
☐ Adults who may lose mental capacity to consent during the course of the research.
☐ Adults in emergency situations.
☐ Adults[2] with mental illness - particularly those detained under the Mental Health Act (1983 & 2007).
☐ Participants who may lack capacity to consent to participate in the research under the research requirements of the Mental Capacity Act (2005).
☐ Prisoners, where ethical approval may be required from the **National Offender Management Service (NOMS).**
☐ Young Offenders, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).
☐ Healthy volunteers (in high risk intervention studies).
☐ Participants who may be considered to have a pre-existing and potentially dependent[3] relationship with the investigator (e.g. those in care homes, students, colleagues, service-users, patients).
☐ Other vulnerable groups (see Question 6).
☐ Adults who are in custody, custodial care, or for whom a court has assumed responsibility.
☐ Participants who are members of the Armed Forces.

[1]If the proposed research involves children or adults who meet the Police Act (1997) definition of vulnerability[3], any researchers who will have contact with participants must have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance.
[2] 'Adults with a learning or physical disability, a physical or mental illness, or a reduction in physical or mental capacity, and living in a care home or home for people with learning difficulties or receiving care in their own home, or receiving hospital or social care services.' (Police Act, 1997)
[3] Proposed research involving participants with whom the investigator or researcher(s) shares a dependent or unequal relationships (e.g. teacher/student, clinical therapist/service-user) may compromise the ability to give informed consent which is free from any form of pressure (real or implied) arising from this relationship. TREC recommends that, wherever practicable, investigators choose participants with whom they have no dependent relationship. Following due scrutiny, if the investigator is confident that the research involving participants in dependent relationships is vital and defensible, TREC will require additional information setting out the case and detailing how risks inherent in the dependent relationship will be managed. TREC will also need to be reassured that refusal to participate will not result in any discrimination or penalty.

6. Will the study involve participants who are vulnerable? YES ☐   NO ☒

For the purposes of research, 'vulnerable' participants may be adults whose ability to protect their own interests are impaired or reduced in comparison to that of the broader population. Vulnerability may arise from the participant's personal characteristics (e.g. mental or physical impairment) or from their social environment, context and/or disadvantage (e.g. socio-economic mobility, educational attainment, resources, substance dependence, displacement or homelessness). Where prospective participants are at high risk of consenting under duress, or as a result of manipulation or coercion, they must also be considered as vulnerable.

Adults lacking mental capacity to consent to participate in research and children are automatically presumed to be vulnerable. Studies involving adults (over the age of 16) who lack mental capacity to consent in research must be submitted to a REC approved for that purpose. Please consult Health Research Authority (HRA) for guidance: https://www.hra.nhs.uk/

6.1. If YES, what special arrangements are in place to protect vulnerable participants' interests?

If **YES**, the research activity proposed will require a DBS check. *(NOTE: information concerning activities which require DBS checks can be found via https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-check-eligible-positions-guidance)*

7. Do you propose to make any form of payment or incentive available to participants of the research? YES ☐   NO ☒

If **YES**, please provide details taking into account that any payment or incentive should be representative of reasonable remuneration for participation and may not be of a value that could be coercive or exerting undue influence on potential participants' decision to take part in the research. Wherever possible, remuneration in a monetary form should be avoided and substituted with vouchers, coupons or equivalent. Any payment made to research participants may have benefit or HMRC implications and participants should be alerted to this in the participant information sheet as they may wish to choose to decline payment.

8. What special arrangements are in place for eliciting informed consent from participants who may not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information provided in English; where participants have special communication needs; where participants have limited literacy; or where children are involved in the research? (Do not exceed 200 words)

The participants of this study will be year 11 teachers in state maintained schools. As a result, all participants should be able access the written information sheet.

My email address will be provided and participants will be invited to contact me for clarification or further information.

SECTION F: RISK ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

9. Does the proposed research involve any of the following? *(Tick as appropriate)*

☐ use of a questionnaire, self-completion survey or data-collection instrument (attach copy)
☐ use of emails or the internet as a means of data collection
☐ use of written or computerised tests
☐ interviews (attach interview questions)
☐ diaries (attach diary record form)
☐ participant observation
☐ participant observation (in a non-public place) without their knowledge / covert research
☒ audio-recording interviewees or events
☐ video-recording interviewees or events
☐ access to personal and/or sensitive data (i.e. student, patient, client or service-user data) without the participant's informed consent for use of these data for research purposes
☐ administration of any questions, tasks, investigations, procedures or stimuli which may be experienced by participants as physically or mentally painful, stressful or unpleasant during or after the research process
☐ performance of any acts which might diminish the self-esteem of participants or cause them to experience discomfiture, regret or any other adverse emotional or psychological reaction
☐ investigation of participants involved in illegal or illicit activities (e.g. use of illegal drugs)
☐ procedures that involve the deception of participants
☐ administration of any substance or agent
☐ use of non-treatment of placebo control conditions
☐ participation in a clinical trial
☐ research undertaken at an off-campus location (risk assessment attached)
☐ research overseas (copy of VCG overseas travel approval attached)

10. Does the proposed research involve any specific or anticipated risks (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life? YES ☒   NO ☐
If **YES**, please describe below including details of precautionary measures.

The area of discussion may be sensitive to some, posing a potential risk of psychological distress. Teachers often enter the profession with the intention to make a difference and to support vulnerable children and young people.
The findings/critical stance of the study could be challenging and conflict with the values, beliefs and political opinions of the participants involved. To mitigate these issues I will:
- provide an information sheet detailing my stance to ensure the participants are able to give informed consent.
- inform and remind participants of their right to withdraw from the process.

- offer follow up support from myself and by signposting them to other avenues of support should they need it (for example, their GP, occupational health or other services applicable to their need).

Focus groups can promote self-disclosure, including inappropriate disclosure, when individuals psychologically identify with other in-group members (Sherriff, Gugglberger, Hall & Scholes, 2014). I will:
- explain to the group that some subjects might be unsuitable for the discussion, e.g. named students or staff members.
- be alert to distress, over-disclosure and possible breaches of confidentiality, redirecting the discussion if appropriate.

Even if the researcher encourages confidentiality, they cannot be sure that the group members will respect it (Sherriff, Gugglberger, Hall & Scholes, 2014). This is particularly pertinent considering the participants will be known to each other, and therefore anonymity is not provided. I will:
- reiterate the importance of respecting confidentiality in the discussions.
- ensure that the inability to guarantee confidentiality is explicit on the participant information sheets.
- explain the limits of confidentiality (such as safeguarding concerns).

After the focus group is conducted, participants will be unable to withdraw their data from the transcript prior to analysis. If data were removed the data cannot be analysed in the same way as the transcript will no longer be 'whole'. It would also affect the meaning of the other participants' contributions (Sim & Waterfield, 2019). I will:
- explain in the consent process that participants have a right to withdraw from the focus group; but that after the completion of the focus group, they cannot withdraw their data. Instead, they can request that their data is not quoted when the study is reported.

11. Where the procedures involve potential hazards and/or discomfort or distress for participants, please state what previous experience the investigator or researcher(s) have had in conducting this type of research.

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist and frequently work with teachers in regards to discussing their practice. I am trained to support people who are distressed, and have experience of this in my placements within Educational Psychology Services and a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team.

As part of my training, I also have a strong understanding of groups and how they function, and have experience of managing groups of adults, including mediating conflicts that arise in these groups.

Before joining the Doctorate programme, I was a Teacher in a secondary school and sixth-form college where I also had safeguarding responsibilities. As a result, I have a good understanding of school contexts and safeguarding procedures, as well as extensive experience of talking to distressed individuals.

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12. Provide an explanation of any potential benefits to participants. Please ensure this is framed within the overall contribution of the proposed research to knowledge or practice. (Do not exceed 400 words)
NOTE: Where the proposed research involves students of our University, they should be assured that accepting the offer to participate or choosing to decline will have no impact on their assessments or learning experience. Similarly, it should be made clear to participants who are patients, service-users and/or receiving any form of treatment or medication that they are not invited to participate in the belief that participation in the research will result in some relief or improvement in their condition.

This research aims to contribute to the literature about teachers' experiences within the profession and the impact of accountability measures on their practice. This understanding should help EPs work with these teachers more empathically and effectively to further the outcomes of low attaining students.

The teachers taking part in the study may find the process of talking about their experiences therapeutic and give them time to consider their own practice. The focus group context may also foster a feeling of comradery between the teachers.

13. Provide an outline of any measures you have in place in the event of adverse or unexpected outcomes and the potential impact this may have on participants involved in the proposed research. (Do not exceed 300 words)

If someone becomes distressed during the focus group I will:
- Pause the discussion and suggest a break. I will speak to the distressed participant to ensure they are okay to continue
- If necessary, bring an early close to the focus group, and delete the recording
- Remain in the school to provide all participants the opportunity to speak to me should they need to
- Offer to return to the school should they wish to speak to me at a later date

If someone chooses to withdraw during the focus group:
- Ask the withdrawn participant if they also wish to withdraw their data
- If yes, explain that their data cannot be removed entirely as what they have said would have had an effect on others' contributions, but instead I will not quote their contributions
- If this is not satisfactory, I will terminate the focus group and delete the recording.

This information will also be included in the information sheets.

14. Provide an outline of your debriefing, support and feedback protocol for participants involved in the proposed research. This should include, for example, where participants may feel the need to discuss thoughts or feelings brought about following their participation in the research. This may involve referral to an external support or counseling service, where participation in the research has caused specific issues for participants. Where medical aftercare may be necessary, this should include details of the treatment available to participants. Debriefing may involve the disclosure of further information on the aims of the research, the participant's performance and/or the results of the research. (Do not exceed 500 words)

At the end of the focus group, I will debrief the participants by informing them:
- I will remain in the room for 45 minutes should anyone want to discuss their experiences
- If they would like to talk to me privately, they can let me know after the session or email me
- If they feel upset or concerned about anything relating to the research now or in the future they can contact me and I can discuss their issues and either provide support or reassurance and/or signpost where to access further support (for example, their GP, occupational health or other services applicable to their need)

I will provide feedback to the participants by producing feedback sheets, and will notify the participants to when and where they can read the research once published.

FOR RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN AWAY FROM THE TRUST OR OUTSIDE THE UK

15. Does any part of your research take place in premises outside the Trust?

☒ **YES,** and I have included evidence of permissions from the managers or others legally responsible for the premises. This permission also clearly states the extent to which the participating institution will indemnify the researchers against the consequences of any untoward event

See Appendix B

16. Does the proposed research involve travel outside of the UK?

☐ **YES,** I have consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/

☐ **YES,** I am a non-UK national and I have sought travel advice/guidance from the Foreign Office (or equivalent body) of my country of origin

☐ **YES,** I have completed the overseas travel approval process and enclosed a copy of the document with this application

For details on university study abroad policies, please contact academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

IF YES:

17. Is the research covered by the Trust's insurance and indemnity provision?

☐ **YES**   ☐ **NO**

18. Please evidence how compliance with all local research ethics and research governance requirements have been assessed for the country(ies) in which the research is taking place.

NOTE:
For students conducting research where the Trust is the sponsor, the Dean of the Department of Education and Training (DET) has overall responsibility for risk assessment regarding their health and safety. If you are proposing to undertake research outside the UK, please ensure that permission from the Dean has been granted before the research commences (please attach written confirmation)

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SECTION G: PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND WITHDRAWAL

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18. Have you attached a copy of your participant information sheet (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials. YES ☒   NO ☐

    If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

---

19. Have you attached a copy of your participant consent form (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.
YES ☒   NO ☐

    If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

---

20. The following is a <u>participant information sheet</u> checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.

☒ Clear identification of the Trust as the sponsor for the research, the project title, the Researcher or Principal Investigator and other researchers along with relevant contact details.

☒ Details of what involvement in the proposed research will require (e.g., participation in interviews, completion of questionnaire, audio/video-recording of events), estimated time commitment and any risks involved.

☒ A statement confirming that the research has received formal approval from TREC.

☐ If the sample size is small, advice to participants that this may have implications for confidentiality / anonymity.

☐ A clear statement that where participants are in a dependent relationship with any of the researchers that participation in the research will have no impact on assessment / treatment / service-use or support.

☒ Assurance that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.

☒ Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

☒ A statement that the data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy.

☒ Advice that if participants have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher(s) or any other aspect of this research project, they should contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

☒ Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

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21. The following is a <u>consent form</u> checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.

☒ Trust letterhead or logo.
☒ Title of the project (with research degree projects this need not necessarily be the title of the thesis) and names of investigators.
☒ Confirmation that the project is research.
☒ Confirmation that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw at any time, or to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
☒ Confirmation of particular requirements of participants, including for example whether interviews are to be audio-/video-recorded, whether anonymised quotes will be used in publications advice of legal limitations to data confidentiality.
☐ If the sample size is small, confirmation that this may have implications for anonymity any other relevant information.
☒ The proposed method of publication or dissemination of the research findings.
☐ Details of any external contractors or partner institutions involved in the research.
☐ Details of any funding bodies or research councils supporting the research.
☒ Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

SECTION H: CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

22. Below is a checklist covering key points relating to the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Please indicate where relevant to the proposed research.

☐ Participants will be completely anonymised and their identity will not be known by the investigator or researcher(s) (i.e. the participants are part of an anonymous randomised sample and return responses with no form of personal identification)?
☐ The responses are anonymised or are an anonymised sample (i.e. a permanent process of coding has been carried out whereby direct and indirect identifiers have been removed from data and replaced by a code, with <u>no</u> record retained of how the code relates to the identifiers).
☒ The samples and data are de-identified (i.e. direct and indirect identifiers have been removed and replaced by a code. The investigator or researchers <u>are</u> able to link the code to the original identifiers and isolate the participant to whom the sample or data relates).
☐ Participants have the option of being identified in a publication that will arise from the research.
☐ Participants will be pseudo-anonymised in a publication that will arise from the research. (I.e. the researcher will endeavour to remove or alter details that would identify the participant.)
☐ The proposed research will make use of personal sensitive data.
☐ Participants consent to be identified in the study and subsequent dissemination of research findings and/or publication.

23. Participants must be made aware that the confidentiality of the information they provide is subject to legal limitations in data confidentiality (i.e. the data may be subject to a subpoena, a freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions). This only applies to named or de-identified data. If your participants are named or de-identified, please confirm that you will specifically state these limitations.

YES ☒   NO ☐

If **NO**, please indicate why this is the case below:

NOTE: WHERE THE PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVES A SMALL SAMPLE OR FOCUS GROUP, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE ADVISED THAT THERE WILL BE DISTINCT LIMITATIONS IN THE LEVEL OF ANONYMITY THEY CAN BE AFFORDED.

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SECTION I: DATA ACCESS, SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT

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24. Will the Researcher/Principal Investigator be responsible for the security of all data collected in connection with the proposed research? YES ☒   NO ☐
If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

---

25. In line with the 5th principle of the Data Protection Act (1998), which states that personal data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes for which it was collected; please state how long data will be retained for.

☐ 1-2 years ☐ 3-5 years ☒ 6-10 years ☐ 10> years

NOTE: Research Councils UK (RCUK) guidance currently states that data should normally be preserved and accessible for 10 years, but for projects of clinical or major social, environmental or heritage importance, for 20 years or longer.
(http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/reviews/grc/grcpoldraft.pdf)

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26. Below is a checklist which relates to the management, storage and secure destruction of data for the purposes of the proposed research. Please indicate where relevant to your proposed arrangements.

☐ Research data, codes and all identifying information to be kept in separate locked filing cabinets.
☒ Access to computer files to be available to research team by password only.
☐ Access to computer files to be available to individuals outside the research team by password only (See **23.1**).
☒ Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically within the European Economic Area (EEA).
☐ Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically outside of the European Economic Area (EEA). (See **28**).
NOTE: Transfer of research data via third party commercial file sharing services, such as Google Docs and YouSendIt are not necessarily secure or permanent. These systems may also be located overseas and not covered by UK law. If the system is located outside the European Economic Area (EEA) or territories deemed to have sufficient standards of data protection, transfer may also breach the Data Protection Act (1998).
☐ Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, e-mails or telephone numbers.
☒ Use of personal data in the form of audio or video recordings.
☐ Primary data gathered on encrypted mobile devices (i.e. laptops). **NOTE:** This should be transferred to secure UEL servers at the first opportunity.
☒ All electronic data will undergo secure disposal.
NOTE: For hard drives and magnetic storage devices (HDD or SSD), deleting files does not permanently erase the data on most systems, but only deletes the reference to the file. Files can be restored when deleted in this way. Research files must be overwritten to ensure they are completely irretrievable. Software is available for the secure erasing of files from hard drives which meet recognised standards to securely scramble sensitive data. Examples of this software are BC Wipe, Wipe File, DeleteOnClick and Eraser for Windows platforms. Mac users can use the standard 'secure empty trash' option; an alternative is Permanent eraser software.
☒ All hardcopy data will undergo secure disposal.
NOTE: For shredding research data stored in hardcopy (i.e. paper), adopting DIN 3 ensures files are cut into 2mm strips or confetti like cross-cut particles of 4x40mm. The UK government requires a minimum standard of DIN 4 for its material, which ensures cross cut particles of at least 2x15mm.

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27. Please provide details of individuals outside the research team who will be given password protected access to encrypted data for the proposed research.

The audio files will be sent to a transcription service via encrypted email. They will not receive any personal data about participants, instead given pseudonyms to help with transcription.

28. Please provide details on the regions and territories where research data will be electronically transferred that are external to the European Economic Area (EEA).

A UK service will be used.

29.   Will this research be financially supported by the United States Department of Health and Human   Services or any of its divisions, agencies or programs? YES ☐   NO ☒

If **YES** please provide details:

SECTION J: PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

30. How will the results of the research be reported and disseminated? *(Select all that apply)*

☒ Peer reviewed journal
☐ Non-peer reviewed journal
☐ Peer reviewed books
☐ Publication in media, social media or website (including Podcasts and online videos)
☐ Conference presentation
☐ Internal report
☐ Promotional report and materials
☐ Reports compiled for or on behalf of external organisations☒ Dissertation/Thesis
☐ Other publication
☒ Written feedback to research participants
☒ Presentation to participants or relevant community groups
☐ Other (Please specify below)

SECTION K: OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES

31. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC)?

SECTION L: CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS

32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application.
☐ Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant) ☐ Recruitment advertisement ☒ Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant) ☒ Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant) ☐ Assent form for children (where relevant) ☒ Evidence of any external approvals needed ☐ Questionnaire ☒ Interview Schedule or topic guide ☐ Risk Assessment (where applicable) ☐ Overseas travel approval (where applicable)
34. Where it is not possible to attach the above materials, please provide an explanation below.

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Appendix R: Ethical approval letter

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699
https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/

Leila Yahyaoui

By Email

27 May 2020

Dear Leila,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: Teacher Accountability Measures and Low Attaining Students, A Critical Discourse
Analysis.

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to
inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your
application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to
methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in
a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Best regards,

Paru Jeram
Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee
T: 020 938 2699
E: academicquality@tavi-Port.nhs.uk

cc.   Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

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Appendix S: Research summary for participant

Research summary
Title: Teachers' discourses around accountability measures and low-attaining pupils: how an economic model of education has commoditised children.

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks for your time and openness when taking part in my doctoral research. I have provided a brief summary of the research below, for your interest.

How was the research conducted?

You took part in a focus group discussing accountability measures and low-attaining students. I recorded and transcribed the discussion, ensuring it was fully anonymised.

How was the data analysed?

The data was analysed through a 'critical discourse analysis'. I was looking at the way accountability measures and low-attaining students were talked about, and how these were influenced by power structures (i.e. government and policy). I also applied a Marxist lens to this analysis, to consider the way capitalism and class structures have an influence.

What were the findings?

The analysis proposed that the marketisation of schools has led to pupils being seen as commodities, with 'exam data' acting as currency.

The interpretation of the findings suggested that the government has placed value on 'knowledge' and 'academia' above all else, with accountability measures being rooted in exam grades. The value placed on academics is proposed to have led to differing levels of value being placed on pupils, depending on the data they are able to produce. Low-attaining pupils are unable to produce the data that results in schools being regarded as successful, and thus there is little incentive for schools to invest their finite resources into them.

The analysis suggested that the current accountability system has resulted in schools' main goal to be to produce exam data, rather than to promote learning. It has forced schools and teachers to practice in ways which may not be beneficial to low-attaining pupils, and which may conflict with their own personal values.

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How can these findings be used?

The research proposes that current policy is not congruent to an education system that is rooted in equity for all children. Although a mass overhaul of education policy is unlikely, there is the potential for accountability measures to be amended to include non-academic measures of school performance.

Within the field of Educational Psychology, it is proposed that Educational Psychologists should be aware of the pressures facing teachers that arise from education policy.

What if I want more information?

If you have any questions, or would like to receive more information about the findings of this study, contact me at leila.yahyaoui@southwark.gov.uk

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