Critical classrooms: how teachers in Further Education engage in critical pedagogy within a neoliberal policy environment

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Critical classrooms: how teachers in Further Education engage in critical pedagogy within a neoliberal policy environment

Rebecca Clare

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

The School of Education and Professional Development
The University of Huddersfield
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I am indebted to my daughter Isobel for her support, encouragement and good humour. This thesis is dedicated to her.
Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of the reasons why and ways in which teachers in English Further Education practise critical pedagogy within a neoliberal policy context. It presents new findings in terms of how and why teachers engage in critical pedagogy; it also presents an original contribution to the field by offering a hermeneutical tool, drawn from Slavko Splichal’s work in communications studies, for understanding the operation of neoliberal hegemony in education and elsewhere. This analytic tool illuminates potential practical and theoretical approaches which may be helpful in the development of counter-hegemonic resistance to neoliberalism.

The thesis argues that neoliberalism has become hegemonic through a reversal of Enlightenment values and priorities and that it is therefore possible to combat the neoliberal advance by a return to the Enlightenment emphasis upon the use of critical reason in public life, but with an added recognition of the impact of power relations shaping both public and private spheres.

The approach is interpretivist and critical and has both theoretical and practical aims and outcomes. It is based on ten semi-structured interviews with teachers in a range of professional contexts in English Further Education. In terms of practice, the thesis resulted in the establishment of a collaborative group of critical educators in the north of England, as well as the founding of a new sixth form college as a site where critical approaches are welcome and encouraged.
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Chapter one: context

1.1 Structure of thesis

The first chapter describes the aims of the thesis and relates these to Apple’s (2009) summary of the requirements of critical research. Context is provided through a literature review which helps to clarify some key concepts and summarises some of the literature which informed this thesis in the areas of neoliberalism in general, neoliberalism and education, critical approaches to education, the analytic method of Slavko Splichal, critical pedagogy, and some key features of the English Further Education sector.

Chapter two concerns the approach and methods of data collection and analysis. It explains why I chose to use a three-stage process centred on semi-structured interviews with informed participants. This chapter explains my interpretivist perspective and includes a discussion of reliability, validity, ethics and operationalisation of concepts. It goes on to explain my choice of thematic analysis as my method of data analysis. The chapter describes the process of coding of data and provides examples of how sections of transcripts were coded; it goes on to discuss the creation of categories, subsequent identification of themes and why Splichal’s analytic grid was used to cast theoretical light upon the themes.

Chapter three concerns the presentation and analysis of the data in terms of four main categories: participants’ views of the current educational environment; participants’ reasons and motivations for engaging in critical pedagogy; a discussion of how participants put critical pedagogy into practice; and some considerations of what would help participants to sustain a critical practice in the future. The chapter presents key theoretical themes and analyses them using a Spichalian approach. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the data produced during the third, reflexive stage of data collection.

Conclusions are presented in chapter four, and these are divided into theoretical conclusions, practical conclusions, and reflections and suggestions for future research and praxis.
1.2 Introduction and aims

This thesis is a contribution to the literature on critical pedagogy and in particular to that body of literature which is concerned with critical pedagogy as a response to neoliberalism. It is based upon semi-structured interviews with ten teachers in a range of contexts in English Further Education and it focusses upon ways in which they seek to maintain a practice of critical pedagogy within a neoliberal policy context. It offers original contributions to the field in two main ways:

1. It presents new empirical findings about how (in terms of methods) and why (in terms of beliefs and influences) teachers in Further Education resist neoliberalism through critical pedagogy;
2. Drawing on the work of Slavko Splichal in the field of communications theory, it offers a new hermeneutical tool for understanding (a) how neoliberal ideas come to dominate education through an act of symbolic violence; (b) how cultural workers such as teachers can nonetheless operate in a dialectical mode with the neoliberal hegemonic base and (c) how the techniques for the reversal of hegemonic neoliberalism in education can be used in practice more broadly by a counter-hegemonic bloc in its resistance to neoliberalism.

The research for the thesis, and the conclusions drawn, also led to distinct practical outcomes, including:

1. The establishment of a group of critical educators in the north of England;
2. The establishment, along critical educational lines, of a new 16-18 school in the north of England.

The approach is interpretivist and critical, with theoretical influences from Marx and Splichal in terms of their analyses of power and the relationship between infrastructure and superstructure.

I examine ways in which participants seek to sidestep, undermine or resist hegemonic neoliberal ideas within their professional contexts. For example, I consider the alternative political, ethical, economic and (in some cases) religious discourses within which participants situate themselves and from which they draw an “alternative imaginary” (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). Further, I describe how this alternative imaginary translates into critical pedagogy in the classroom – in other words, how the theoretical influences drawn on by participants translate into practical action in professional life. The thesis thus considers the interpretations of critical pedagogy made by the participants, both in terms of the theoretical basis of critical pedagogy and in terms of participants' views of the translation of theory into material reality.
I suggest ways in which those who are concerned about the shrinking spaces available to critical educators within English Further Education (and elsewhere) might consolidate, sustain and develop their critical practice through the collaborative production of a flexible and fertile counter-hegemonic discourse in difficult circumstances. I describe the beginnings of a counter-hegemonic educational initiative prompted by the thesis.

I conclude that a Splichalian analysis explains how an anti-educative worldview that has become ‘natural’ through an act of symbolic violence is reversed by the practitioners interviewed for this thesis and that the mechanics of this reversal can be distilled and transferred to new contexts within and outside of the education system as part of the collaborative resistance to the neoliberal hegemony. One of the sites in which this reversal is being put into practice is in a new sixth form college which I recently set up with two colleagues.

This thesis, then, has both theoretical and practical aims, in keeping with recognised approaches to critical educational research. In this way I am situating my approach within the tradition of critical praxis (Freire, 1996) which demands that research moves from theoretical exposition to practical action and which emphasizes the need for both analysis and practice to be collaborative endeavours. hooks, for example, has said:

[I]t is crucial that critical thinkers who want to change our teaching practices talk to one another, collaborate in a discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for intervention ... we often have no concrete examples of individuals who actually occupy different locations within structures, sharing ideas with one another, mapping out terrains of commonality, connection and shared concern with teaching practices.

(hooks, 1994: 129-130)

This thesis addresses some of these concerns by providing examples of individual critical practice and spaces for intervention and by highlighting areas of commonality. It also resulted in the development of new locations (the new sixth form college in particular) for counter-hegemonic practice. Further, it responds to many of the tasks outlined by Apple et al (2009: 4-5), who call for critical educational research which will, amongst other things:

1. Illuminate the ways in which educational policy and practice are connected to the relations of exploitation and domination. (ibid: 4).

This thesis does this by discussing the influence of neoliberalism on education policy and in particular upon post-16 education. I follow Harvey (2005) and Stiglitz (2002), inter alia, in arguing that neoliberal economic policies operate in the interests of the capitalist class rather than in the interests of all; I agree with Althusser (1971), Hill (2013b) and
McLaren (2005), inter alia, that this class interest is reproduced and legitimized in significant ways through the ideological state apparatus of the education system.

2. Indicate “spaces of possible action” (Apple et al, op cit.: 4).

I do this by highlighting practical opportunities taken by teachers to engage in critical pedagogy and by addressing theoretical issues of how it might be possible to challenge hegemonic neoliberalism through the development of a counter-hegemonic bloc. This theoretical consideration of the relationship between infrastructure and superstructure (and the possibilities of knowledge) draws upon Splichal’s post-Habermasian writings on the production (and silencing) of particular forms of knowledge, and illuminates epistemological questions of how counter-hegemonic knowledge is produced and sustained. I explore the discourses and alternative imaginaries underpinning counter-hegemonic practices and I suggest ways in which such practices might then impact upon the dominant neoliberal imaginary by acting as critical wedges to open up and expand spaces for critical education. It is, I argue, important that critical educators neither give up nor simply try to maintain a professional life as anachronistic curiosities in spaces round the edges of the neoliberal advance. As Landy comments:

More than ever, education needs to be reconsidered as crucial for the creation of alternative positions that can actively generate alternative political practices by producing new forms of knowledge capable of challenging and altering the exploitation and manipulation of large sectors of the world.

(Landy, 2011: 40)

Education, of course, is a site of cultural transmission and legitimization of norms and values; those educators who believe that the norms and values transmitted under neoliberalism are reductive, ignoble and exploitative can reclaim space for alternative views through determined collaborative action supported by theoretical analysis. Avis has commented:

If education is thought of as a site of struggle, one in which inequality is produced, interventions within the classroom may serve to interrupt this process. In this way attempts to transform learning cultures within further education may have a subversive edge. After all it would be risible to evacuate the classroom, or indeed education, as a site of struggle.

(Avis, 2007: 159-160)

Of course, it is difficult to find spaces to continue this struggle, given the constraints of funding and the culture of performativity and instrumentalism within English F.E., and my research incidentally illuminates something of the personal and professional cost incurred by critical pedagogues in the sector (see also Apple, 2013:21-22). However, my research also offers an account of how the struggle can be sustained (and is being
sustained), alongside political and ethical considerations of why it ought to be sustained. I also describe how the thesis inspired me to set up new educational initiatives (a group of educators and a school) founded on the principles of critical education. Whether sustained critical education can take place long term in the context of a post-neoliberal form of capitalism, or whether criticality leads to other forms of capitalism or to socialism as the political and economic arrangements most likely to support social justice, is beyond the scope of the current thesis.

3. Act “as ‘secretaries’ to those groups of people and social movements who are now engaged in challenging existing relations of unequal power.” (Apple et al, op cit 4.).

As Apple would recognise, the notion of ‘secretary’, with its implications of bearing objective witness, is problematic since any act of representation involves selection and interpretation; with this limitation in mind I document examples of pedagogical practice that challenge and critique economic, political and social power structures. By sharing knowledge about existing critical practice, acknowledging work already underway and showing where critical spaces are being opened up and sustained, I provide examples that may be transferred and adapted to suit other contexts (including, perhaps, other schools, colleges and universities).

4. Engage in debate around issues of power, knowledge, policy and educational issues, keep radical traditions alive and critique and update these traditions. (ibid.)

I relate my research to the critical intellectual traditions of Marxism and neo-Marxism and to Splichal’s communications theory in an attempt to reveal the dynamics of power/knowledge at play in contemporary English Further Education policy and practice. By exploring the ideology influencing English Further Education and the theoretical underpinnings of participants’ pedagogical stances, I consider questions about the impact of structures, discourses and policies upon the practices and individuals within them. In part this is in an attempt to examine a question which has of course long pre-occupied Marxists and neo-Marxists and which is phrased succinctly by Education Group II:

If choice is circumscribed, how none the less do people exercise real agency, in important if conditional ways, making their own world?

(Education Group II, 1991: xii)
In this respect, I consider Splichal’s (2006b) analytic grid for examining the conditions and effects of structural censorship. This analytic framework indicates ways in which hegemonic cultural manifestations can be reversed.

5. *[Act] in concert with ... progressive social movements ... or in movements against ... rightist assumptions and policies (Apple *et al*, opcit.: 5, original emphasis).

Here, some aspects of my own positionality in relation to this research are relevant. At the time of conducting the interviews, I was a teacher educator and a Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) representative, a member of the Socialist Workers’ Party and an activist in campaigns against UK Government cuts to the public sector. I was also an activist Quaker with an interest in alternative forms of education such as Quaker schools. My academic research and political activism support each other. My research also illuminates ways in which participants draw inspiration from and act together with a range of movements and organisations outside of formal education institutions. Indeed, such links to activism are, I believe, central to the concept of critical pedagogy. In this connection, Avis has written:

> Educational struggles need to be lodged within a social movement that seeks to undermine oppressive and exploitative relations in order to extend social justice and democracy throughout society.

*(Avis, 2007: 165)*

This is a sentiment echoed by a range of influential Marxist commentators, such as Hill, who draw on various notions, including the Gramscian concept of the teacher as organic intellectual, to underline the importance of working alongside other activists in the struggle against capitalism. Hill writes:

> Educators participating in mass (or mini-) actions as part of a broader movement for economic and social justice is a key arena of resistance that must not be overlooked or underestimated. Ideological intervention in classrooms and in other cultural sites can have dramatic effect ... However, actualising that ideology – that opposition to oppressive state or capitalist action; feeling the solidarity, feeling the blood stir, feeling the pride in action and joint learning that comes from that experience – can develop individual as well as collective confidence, understanding, commitment.

*(Hill, 2007b: 93)*

6. Open up privileged spaces to others *(Apple *et al*, opcit.: 5)*.

In this respect, my academic privilege of doing doctoral research is used to question power structures and to argue in support of the need for critical practitioners and
academics in Further Education. This is especially important given the neoliberal policy agenda in England and its likely negative impact on critical education in the English Further Education system. It is crucial that education remains an institution where critical perspectives can be maintained.

1.3 Background and literature review

1.3.1 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a term now widely used (although initially contested) to refer to the particular instance of developed consumerist capitalism under which we live and within the bounds (or in reaction to the bounds) of whose hegemonic discourses we construct our identities (see, e.g., Foucault, 1978 / 2010; Stiglitz, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Rachleff, 2006; Brown, 2006; Peters, 2007; Davies and Bansel, 2007; Madra and Adaman, 2010; Hursh and Henderson, 2011; Hill, 2013a and 2013b; Malott et al, 2013).

Neoliberalism as the current form of capitalism differs from previous liberalisms in several respects which make it a particularly destructive political and economic approach (Simmons, 2010). For example, whereas previous liberalisms have tended to distance economic matters from state intervention, neoliberalism is distinctive in that it uses the apparatus of the state to render its institutions and populations fit for its own purpose, which is to transfer wealth to the capitalist classes (Malott et al, 2013). Postwar Keynesian economics in western democracies enabled the development of reasonable conditions, won through struggle, for workers in liberal capitalist democracies, thus enabling continued and increased consumption and the steady accumulation of capital by the capitalist classes. However, with the oil crises and stagflation of the 1970s, capital accumulation came to a halt and les trentes glorieuses crumbled in the face of Thatcherism and Reagonomics, which sought to boost the process of accumulation through cuts to public services, increasing privatisation, deregulation for the capitalist class, increased regulation and surveillance for workers and the ‘economisation of the social’ (Madra and Adaman, 2010).

This intervention of the market into the functions of the state and into the social world has had a profound impact on the relationship between the state and citizens on a global scale (though it should of course be acknowledged that neoliberalism, though a globalised discourse, has particular local forms which take different shapes according to local conditions). This pervasive impact has reshaped the ways in which citizens picture their lives, values, aspirations, social relations, jobs and dreams. Neoliberalism’s chorus is ‘there is no alternative’ to its own modus operandi – a modus operandi which
constrains and dehumanises by reducing human life to quantifiable, observable, controllable, monetisable, utilitarian, deracinated fragments.

Neoliberalism achieves this remoulding of citizens as pliant, docile consumers and workers partly through its dominance over ideological state apparatus such as the media and education. Davies and Bansel, commenting on the former, write:

This fantasy is both produced and made tangible through the public circulation of celebrity lifestyles, cosmetic surgery and fashion tips. These, along with reality television, home renovation, cooking and gardening programmes, locate media viewers within practices of consumption through which they come to understand that whatever they have is not enough, and that more is always better. Further, ambitions to wealth are modelled by corporate heroes and savvy entrepreneurs, and brought within reach through the promise of lotteries and ‘get rich quick schemes’. Practices of consumption, attached to a discourse of lifestyle, install desire within subjects in such a way as to consolidate their embeddedness in discourses of success as material, as involving economic ambitions and desires above all else. In this way, the market, as a model of entrepreneurship, is firmly installed in the desire of each subject to ‘be’ and to ‘become’.

(Davies and Bansel: 2007:49)

Dreams and spectacles of consumer goods serve to entice citizens into hope for (eternally-deferred, always just out of reach) material rewards; nightmares of job insecurity, poor working conditions, increased surveillance, erosion of workers’ rights and increasing debt help to ensure that workers are docile and unquestioning. Of course, there is room for movement and resistance and a politics of hope – indeed, if there were not, then there would be little point in (or scope for) practising critical pedagogy. Gramsci (1971), for instance, contended that, although the working class is complicit in and consents to the co-creation of hegemony, consciousness-raising and critical approaches to education can result in the creation of a counter-hegemonic bloc. A dialectical approach to education can facilitate this development:

Gramsci’s conception of common sense suggests that in order to understand the ways in which individuals operate within cultural constraints and possibilities, socialist education must explore, identify, and criticize – not prescribe – the various elements that constitute common sense, paying specific attention to what has been displaced or elided, what appears as residual and as emergent, as oppositional and as alternative, in order to work toward more critical/ political formulations.

(Landy, 2011: 48)

1.3.2 Neoliberalism and education

As the contemporary state’s main ideological apparatus (Althusser, 1971), the education system has a pivotal role to play in the reproduction and legitimization of the material
reality of classed society and of cultural aspects of neoliberalism so that neoliberalism appears ‘natural’ and neutral. A great deal has been written about the impact of neoliberalism upon education and the rate of publication of articles on this theme has accelerated since the global financial crisis which began in 2007-2008 and which signalled an intensification of neoliberal agendas in many countries, not least the UK, Greece and the USA.

Hill, for instance, has taken a consistently Marxist and revolutionary approach in his analysis of neoliberalism and its effects upon education in the UK and elsewhere (and has been at pains to link his theoretical analysis with activism in a range of countries and situations). Ten years ago, he wrote:

In the current and recent periods, education has been increasingly – and increasingly nakedly – subordinated, not just to the general requirements of capital, but also to the specific demands made of governments by the capitalist class. The relative autonomy of education from the requirements of capital, from the government, and within education at various levels, has been blowtorched – the rhetorical and policy accretions of ‘professionalism’ and of relative autonomy have been burned away, leaving the skeletal structure of command in its unadorned nakedness.

(Hill, 2004: 506)

Hill has been involved in the recent protests in Greece and Turkey against neoliberal control of education and this has informed his subsequent writing; he has also linked neoliberalism with neoconservatism and identified a range of ways in which this alliance impacts upon education, including privatisation, marketisation, vocational education for human capital, “brutalising management” of the workforce, competition between workers, casualization of public sector workers, attacks on trade unions, managerialism, attacks on the public sector workforce (impacts which Hill assigns to neoliberalism); control of curricula, pedagogy, students and teachers, appeal to traditional values, and the use of brute force on campus (impacts assigned to neoconservatism) (2012, reprinted in 2013b, 172-174). Other scholars, such as Brown (2006), have discussed the affinity between neoliberalism and neoconservatism and their dual role in the suppression of critical thought in education, and indeed Education Group II at the University of Birmingham decades ago linked neoliberalism and neoconservatism as aspects of the New Right (Education Group II, 1991).

Since the recent economic crisis in Greece, a number of scholars have written about the roots of the crisis in neoliberalism and about its devastating impact on education in that country and elsewhere. Among these are Hyslop-Margison and Nikolakaki (2013), who argue forcefully that neoliberalism undermines the democratic goals of education,
who characterise the contemporary as the ‘New Dark Ages’. In this, they echo the seminal critical education theorist, Henry Giroux, who writes:

> The production of knowledge in schools today is instrumental, wedded to objective outcomes, privatized, and is largely geared to producing consuming subjects. The organisational structures that make such knowledge possible enact serious costs on any viable notion of critical education and critical pedagogy. Teachers are deskilled, largely reduced to teaching for the test, business culture organizes the governance structures of schooling, knowledge is viewed as a commodity, and students are treated reductively as both consumers and workers. Teachers are no longer asked to be creative or to think critically... on the contrary, they have been reduced to the keeper of methods, implementers of an audit culture, and removed from assuming autonomy in their classrooms.

(Giroux, 2013: no page)

Giroux’s many recent writings on neoliberalism and its effects on education can be found on the radical news website, Truthout; in his latest article (2014), he contends that education in our present age is characterised by totalitarian repression, and quotes Arendt:

> The aim of totalitarian education has never been to instil convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any.


Giroux invokes Orwellian notions of surveillance and Kafka’s ideas about regimes of fear: this, he claims, is how education is constituted today. Education, according to Giroux, is becoming increasingly subject to surveillance in order that students might be schooled into compliance and their every ‘thought’ monitored, whilst teachers are occupied in dreary routine tasks and are themselves constantly surveilled and fearful for their livelihoods. As a result:

> Schools no longer are viewed as places that create dreams of greatness, extend the horizons of the imagination or point to a future that refuses to mimic the present.

(Giroux, 2014, no page)

The view of New Right / neoliberal educationalists (such as Michael Gove) is, on the other hand, that a quasi-market in education will drive up standards and ensure a competitive workforce in a globalised market and that accountability of teachers needs to be ensured through a robust system of audit and inspection. Education Group II described many of the chief aspects of the New Right approach to education three years after the 1988 Education Reform Act and the subject continues to occupy scholars twenty years later:
On the one hand, within Conservative education policy, belief in markets and a minimal state, basic tenets of neoliberalism, have meant a push for privatisation, the ‘liberation’ of schools to innovate and diversify, and an enhanced role for parents as consumers in an educational marketplace. On the other, strong distrust of a ‘left-wing’ teaching profession, coupled with firm Conservative beliefs in ‘real subjects’ ... have meant the imposition of strong accountability measures, detailed instruction over what should be taught in schools and a great deal of surveillance imposed from above. Conservative education policy is also associated with a strong view that the route to tackling poverty and educational underachievement lies in greater personal responsibility.

(Exley and Ball, 2011: 97)

Some of the basic differences in interpretation of recent policies, from a right and radical left perspective, are summarised in the table below.

**Table 1: policy interpretations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Neoliberal or Neoconservative</th>
<th>Right interpretation</th>
<th>Radical left interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased parental choice</td>
<td>NL</td>
<td>Empowering parents to make better choices; quasi-market drives up standards</td>
<td>Middle class parents benefit more because they are ‘skilled choosers’ (Ball et al 1996); working class children end up in failing schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>League tables</td>
<td>NL</td>
<td>Information designed to help parents choose; drives up standards</td>
<td>League tables are narrow, decontextualised and reductive and put undue pressure on educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ofsted</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Ensures accountability and rigour</td>
<td>Surveillance, control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBacc / emphasis on traditional academic subjects</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Ensures academic rigour</td>
<td>Either narrow and restrictive, knowledge of the dominant class; or ‘powerful knowledge’ which facilitates social justice (Young et al, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competencies and skills</td>
<td>NL</td>
<td>Fits workers for globalised labour force</td>
<td>Either: fits workers for globalised labour forces and is therefore a good thing; or channels the working class into working class jobs and is therefore a means of reproduction of class structure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Neoliberal or neoconservative
The teachers interviewed for this thesis were particularly critical of those policies labelled here as neoliberal. The neoconservative emphasis upon traditional subjects did not draw criticism and my stance on this is similar to Michael Young’s (2013); I return to this on page 24.

1.3.3 Critical education theory

Neoliberalism has an impact in two main ways upon education; as Althusser stated, education reproduces and legitimizes class hierarchies (Althusser, 1971). In the first case, reproduction can be explained by classical Marxist materialism: students from different strata in society are schooled in different ways in order to fulfil different functions in the economy. This is largely the kind of Marxist critique evident in the work of the stalwarts of A level sociology curricula, Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Willis (1977). For example, in the UK, 16-19 education is stratified into vocational education, which largely reproduces the working classes; academic education in the state system, which reproduces those who will manage the working classes and the assets of the capitalist classes; and private academic education, which reproduces the capitalist classes. In the second instance, theorists draw upon critical cultural theorists such as the Frankfurt school, Habermas, Bourdieu, Foucault and (I would add) Splichal, to explain how the education system contributes to the formation of individuals as consenting docile subjects.

Critical cultural theorists are, of course, concerned with the superstructure at least as much as the infrastructure and their theories typically address the ways in which ideas and the internal life are constituted in relation to particular material circumstances. Althusser, for instance, discussed the ways in which the education system functions as an ideological state apparatus in inculcating the beliefs and values needed by capitalism (Althusser, 1971), whilst Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is also pertinent to the ways in which particular worldviews (here, neoliberalism) are able to present themselves as natural and neutral, beyond question (Gramsci, 1971). Thus, for instance, there are

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2 My understanding of class here is Marxist rather than Weberian: one’s class depends on one’s position relative to the means of production – if one owns them, one is a member of the bourgeoisie or capitalist class; if one works for a wage, one is a member of the proletariat. This is not to deny that other strata exist in society, both in terms of income / occupation and in terms of identity (race, gender and so forth), but the existence of these latter does not negate the existence of the former and is of secondary interest in this thesis – I will return to this debate in the section below on different forms of critical pedagogy.
many students and teachers today in education who do not critically interrogate current educational practices because the current system seems part of the natural order of things: after all, they think, if we want as a nation to be competitive in the global market, is it not clear that each individual should upskill in order to ensure increased employability and a healthy economy? Certainly, the skills agenda in Further Education (and, increasingly, throughout state education) in the UK is based on this premise. As Simmons comments:

For the present Government, assumptions about a direct causal relationship between levels of education, skill and economic success appear to have achieved an almost hegemonic status... In the UK, it is commonly argued by politicians and policy-makers that if education systems can produce the desired number and mix of skilled workers, individuals, businesses and the nation as a whole will be able to benefit from the new global division of labour. At the same time, however, it is also fashionable to criticise education as failing to deliver the skilled workforce deemed necessary for the knowledge economy. This situation, it is claimed - unless reversed - will lead to failure in the global marketplace which will, in turn, lead to social and economic doom. (Simmons, unpublished thesis, 2009)

From the point of view of critical theory, the relentless emphasis on skills and the concomitant constitution of the citizen as a worker who needs constantly to invest in their own marketability are forms of governmentality which dehumanise the individual and the education system and encourage a worldview characterised by marketization and economic values alone.

Many critical education theorists have used the work of Foucault, Bourdieu, Althusser, Gramsci and others to elucidate the ways in which the current neoliberal worldview constitutes both what counts as knowledge (whatever is needed for the economy) and what is important in an individual life (marketable skills, docility, consumerism). Hill, for instance, has drawn upon Althusser’s notions of the ideological state apparatus (Hill, 2004); Lingard (2005), Simmons (2009) and others have made use of Bourdieu’s concepts of doxa, habitus and field in their various analyses of education; Cotoi (2011), Peters (2007) and many others have drawn upon Foucault’s concepts of governmentality and biopolitics (Foucault, 1978/1979 / 2008); Giroux (2002) has made much use of Gramsci’s writings on hegemony and organic intellectuals; Brookfield (2005) and Mezirow (2003) and others have made much use of Habermasian notions of critical reasoning and the public sphere.
1.3.4 Splichal

The work of Splichal has been less used in the critical analysis of education; one contribution of the present thesis is to suggest that his work in communications theory can be transferred from critical media studies to critical education studies with very fruitful results. Splichal’s analysis (2006b) of the production and selection of knowledge and the effects of surveillance are useful tools for understanding aspects of the contemporary education system. His main focus is the structural censorship of the media but his analysis also has explanatory power when applied to education (and possibly to any other ideological state apparatus, such as religion in some circumstances).

Splichal’s writing is influenced by his experience of the security state and is marked by a concern for the development of the public sphere as a counter-balance to possible abuses of state power. In this, he is very much concerned with Habermas’ idea of ‘öffentlichkeit’ (‘public sphere’; Habermas, 1979, 1992), Bentham’s concept of the press as the fourth estate and Kant’s concept of publicity as the transcendental ground for public justice (Splichal 2001 in particular). Splichal is concerned with the ways in which the press in particular and public life in general have been co-opted by the interests of capital (Splichal 2002). He has written in this connection of the need to legislate to protect a pan-European right to communicate without interference from corporate interests (Splichal 2006a).

Splichal’s approach is, then, influenced by Habermasian critical hermeneutics, with a marked concern for the liberation of citizens from the influences of the dominant, capitalist hegemony (Somekh and Lewin, 2005: 294). He is also influenced by Foucauldian radical hermeneutics and by Freudian psychoanalysis. In this latter connection, Splichal is interested in the ways in which public discourse is mediated through and impacts upon individual consciousness. In 2006b, for example, Splichal uses Freud’s insights into dream distortions to illuminate the distorting effects of power upon public communication.

Splichal uses an analytic grid to explain the censoring and constitutive functions of dominant discourses. He writes:

Censorship may be conceived as a gate-keeping formation located on any between-system boundary, for example between the ‘inner self’ and ‘the social self’, between ‘the private’ and ‘the public’, between ‘the hidden’ and ‘the visible’.

(Splichal, 2006b:106)
In other words, a technology or discourse that mediates between inner and outer worlds has the potential to act as a censor – both of what can appear in the inner world (such as our sense of our selves and our view of knowledge) and in the outer world. The grid is particularly useful in illustrating the movement and relationship between forms of publicity and forms of privacy, between centrifugal and centripetal forces; the process is one of dynamic inter-relationships rather than a static framework (and because there is room for manoeuvre, then there is room for a politics of hope, to which I return later).

Spichal’s grid makes it clear that censor-gatekeepers can be located at different points along two axes. Censorship as it is popularly conceived (i.e. the restriction or suppression of certain kinds of information) can be located in the main in the bottom, right-hand quadrant of the grid, where, through the exercising of surveillance, the state (or another institution, such as a large corporation) is able to suppress certain kinds of activity. The effects of this upon the individual can be located in the bottom, left-hand quadrant, these being social exclusion and the silencing of individuals. The grid also makes it clear that censorship (of ideas, of the inner life) can happen not just through repression of information but also through the forced spectacle of selected information.

Spichal’s analysis resonates with key aspects of the work of critical theorists such as Althusser, Gramsci and Foucault and in many ways provides a useful, graphic summary of a number of key conceptual approaches. For instance, one could say that disciplinary technologies relating to different ideological state apparatuses are located along the x and y axes of the grid; their functioning serves to preserve hegemonic views. Moreover,
the vertical axis delineates the border (which, of course, is permeable) between the external and the internal; whilst the horizontal axis turns on the binary of spectacle and repression. Splichal’s approach also indicates ways in which cultural solutions to the current problematic neoliberal hegemony might be found, insofar as if one presents the grid one way and exposes that which is properly private, then the result is superficiality, spectacle, sound-bite, vacuity; however, if one rotates the grid and restores rationality and critical discourse to the public realm; and feelings, opinions, tastes and beliefs to the private realm, then the result is depth of public discourse as well as safeguards around personal privacy.

It is useful to consider how this grid might explicate the effects of neoliberalism upon the education system and those who work and study within it. Policies and other state actions appear on the right hand side of the grid; their effects on individuals (students, staff, individual classes) within education can be read on the left hand side. The explanatory power of the grid works with a wide range of neoliberal discourses and policies, such as the use of league tables. League tables are one way in which educational institutions in the UK are controlled and surveilled under neoliberalism and as such can be positioned within the upper right quadrant of the analytic grid. League tables impose visibility on government-defined positivist, quantitative, instrumental outcomes and simultaneously render invisible information not deemed relevant for publicity, such as qualitative accounts of the student experience, which would therefore be located in the bottom right quadrant. The impact upon individuals of the public surveillance culture exemplified by league tables is then observed on the left hand side of the grid: an intrusion into the daily lived experience of education workers and students (top left) which then serves to silence other ways of knowing and other ways of valuing (bottom left). In this way, the imposition of league tables under neoliberalism can be seen to render invisible the possibility of its own critique, since criticality is not measured in league tables and is therefore silenced. Criticality may (as this thesis shows) survive around the edges, but it is diminished and ‘othered’ by the overwhelming emphasis upon positivist outcomes.

1.3.5 Critical Pedagogy

Apple et al (2009) give the following definition of critical pedagogy:

Critical pedagogy ... broadly seeks to expose how relations of power and inequality ... are manifest and are challenged in the formal and informal education of children and adults.

(Apple et al, 2009: 3)
The concept of ‘critical pedagogy’ is multivalent, used by critical race theorists, Marxists, neo-Marxists, feminists, Foucauldians, queer theorists, liberal democrats and others. It also has a long pedigree: some of the concepts which are central to critical pedagogy – for instance, praxis, critical reason, dialectical questioning – can be traced back centuries (Lima, 2014); the former is certainly found in the writings of Marx, Engels and Hegel (*ibid*: 286-288), whilst the latter two concepts can, of course, be found in the works of Plato and Aristotle.

During the twentieth century, there was strong interest from the Frankfurt school as well as Gramsci, Habermas and, especially, Freire in the concept and practice of critical pedagogy. In the context of critical cultural theory, critical pedagogy provides a positive narrative of the possibilities for changing ideas and consciousness raising, thus moving away from the determinism some have detected in classical Marxism. Critical pedagogy is a form of education which uncovers power relationships and vested interests, with a view to *doing something about inequality*. Theorists and practitioners of critical pedagogy are concerned with the ways in which counter-hegemonic knowledge can be developed and sustained and used as a base for changing the material conditions of society – in other words, the relationship between the infrastructure and superstructure is seen as two way. Ideas can influence material circumstances, just as material circumstances influence ideas.

During the last century, critical pedagogy has appealed to a range of practitioners, not all of whom have necessarily been from the Marxist tradition. Freire’s insistence on the political nature of education, on the inadequacy of the ‘banking’ model of education, on the development of reciprocity and deep relationships between teacher and student (1972) have been deeply influential on Marxist thinkers and also upon a broad coalition of those concerned with questions of social justice and inequality. This has included, *inter alia*:

1. Liberal democrat social reformers, whose main objective is simply the progressive reformation of society towards social justice and the renaissance of liberal democracy (e.g. Shor, 1992). Such reformers use the emphasis upon critical reason within critical pedagogy as the basis for the reinvigoration of liberal democracy, which is typically seen as under attack by capitalism, especially in recent writing. The globalisation of capitalist interests has eroded the sovereignty of nation states and the political reach of citizens, often without those citizens being fully aware of whose interests are best served by the contemporary economic formation. In order to reinstate democratic control and expose the power relationships at work, such scholars advocate the use of critical pedagogy;
2. Postmodernists, identity theorists and others, whose particular concerns may include race or gender, for example, have used critical pedagogy to attempt to expose and redress the power relationships that oppress particular groups in society. Rikowski has referred to this approach as “second level” critique which is concerned with:

All forms of inequality in capitalist society ... class inequality, sexism, racism, discrimination against gay and lesbian people, against disabled people, ageism and differential treatment of other social groups.

(Rikowski, 2004: 567)

3. Marxist theorists, who may be reformist, Parliamentarian or revolutionary; the latter (such as Peter McLaren) sometimes refer to revolutionary critical pedagogy or radical pedagogy in order to differentiate their interpretation from that of reformers or postmodernists. This group of critical theorists, which also includes Hill, Allman and Rikowski, has been in the ascendant in recent years, especially since the financial crisis which began in 2007 and which signalled a renewed global interest in Marxism and the possibilities of revolution and a declining interest in postmodernism as an explanatory perspective. Rikowski (2007) refers to this type of critical pedagogy as 'first level' critique since it addresses the basic economic structures of capitalism which generate or provide the context for inequalities in the first place.

The field of critical pedagogy has seen debate and mutual criticism from theorists taking different perspectives and has recently been questioned by other left educators such as Michael Young, who refers to, “the empty rhetoric of much of what passes for critical pedagogy” (2014: 90) and says that Freire’s approach to pedagogy “led to a one-sided emphasis on ‘practice’” (ibid. 13); Young’s position is that social justice is best served in education by an approach which furnishes disadvantaged students with powerful knowledge.

Young is right to suggest that critical pedagogy can lead simply to empty questioning and the prioritisation of experience over knowledge; this is indeed likely to happen if done from a radically postmodern perspective which is directionless and largely value-free. It does also sometimes characterise some work in Marxist / neo-Marxist critical pedagogy, which is regrettable. For instance, Smyth has argued that critical pedagogy:

means accepting that knowledge does not exist independently of the meaning and significance which students attach to it by virtue of their previous experiences, their class and their culture.

(Smyth, 2011:26)
However, this interpretation of knowledge is certainly not the only, or even principle, one available to critical pedagogues; indeed, Young himself goes on to acknowledge that critical pedagogy is, “part of a much broader intellectual heritage that can be traced back to Kant and the Enlightenment” (ibid: 90). In this Enlightenment tradition, critical reason is precisely the tool used to discover publically agreed-upon knowledge. Only critical reason can critique power structures and one-sided views of what counts as knowledge; it does this in the interests of establishing ever more accurate versions of knowledge, just as scientific method is the only way in which science approximates ever more adequate accounts of scientific knowledge. Certainly, if the method becomes the point and if we took the method to imply that any knowledge at all is just as likely to be true, then we have a worthless approach to education that will leave students confused and disempowered. Neither science nor critical reason do in fact proceed like this, however. Rather, scientific method and dialectical reasoning seek to dismiss inadequate pictures of the world as they build up, step by careful step, a more adequate, yet inevitably eternally provisional view of the world. Provisionality does not necessarily imply absolute relativism. Some views and statements are better than others, because better winnowed and tested and explored and justified. These views have been moved further away from one-sidedness and exposed to the multi-directional searchlight of critique. It might not be completely true to say, for instance, that Shakespeare is one of the best playwrights in history, but critical and public reason helps us to establish the criteria (themes of broad significance, innovative use of language, clever plot twists and use of secret identities, broad emotional range, ability to use humour, undercutting of sentimentalism etc) by which we might judge that Shakespeare is a better playwright than most. Indeed, this kind of reasoning (and the powerful knowledge it produces) is precisely what Young advocates as the basis for the reintroduction and reinvigoration of knowledge in schools:

Knowledge is powerful if it predicts, if it explains, if it enables you to envisage alternatives.

(ibi. 74)

Interestingly, critical pedagogy has also drawn criticism from the opposite corner to that occupied by Young and has been accused of prioritising the idea of universal knowledge and reason too much. Famously, Ellsworth accused critical theorists of oppressive practices:

Educators who have constructed classroom practices dependent upon analytic critical judgment can no longer regard the enforcement of rationalism as a self-evident political act against relations of domination. Literary criticism, cultural studies, post-structuralism, feminist studies, comparative studies, and media studies have by now amassed overwhelming evidence of the extent to which the myths of the ideal
rational person and the ‘universality’ of propositions have been oppressive to those who are not European, White, male, middle-class, Christian, able-bodied, thin, and heterosexual…. Whilst poststructuralism, like rationalism, is a tool that can be used to dominate, it has also facilitated a devastating critique of the violence of rationalism against its Others.

(Ellsworth, 1989: 303-304)

Ellsworth’s point, as with many postmodernists, is that ‘rationality’ is a white, male, European construct and, as such, it cannot be used as a tool for liberation. The idea of critical rationality, however, is very much less Euro-centric than Ellsworth suggests and can be found, for instance, in the philosophical schools of early Buddhism as much as in the post-Enlightenment west; neither is it ontologically gendered, even if historically it has been men who have tended to dominate philosophy and politics, spheres in which critical reason is central. Critical reason is a tool open to all and possibly a fundamental category of human experience and thought, as Kant maintained (1781 / 1978). Critical reason is a process, not a thing; certainly, the products on which it reflects are often cultural artefacts, but this does not imply that the process of reasoning itself is an artefact. It also does not imply that critical reason is unembedded - Foucault, commenting on Habermas, has written:

The idea that there could exist a state of communication that would allow games of truth to circulate freely, without any constraints, seems utopian to me.

(Foucault, 1998: 448)

The constraints are acknowledged by properly critical reason. What else could acknowledge them? Splichal’s approach, although it draws heavily upon Habermas, provides a means of identifying, analysing and reversing these constraints. Although poststructuralist theorists such as Derrida have argued that essentialism is unwarranted (Derrida, 1994), and postmodern theorists in general point to the socially constructed nature of ‘truth’ and ‘reality’, questioning the Enlightenment conception of the decontextualised, ‘disembodied’, rational mind, if one resists the temptation to reify reason then there is no issue here: it is the project and process which matter, rather than the impossibility of perfect objectivity. Just as in the natural sciences, it is scientific method that counts, rather than errors and inaccuracies and despite the limitations imposed by our current understanding and technology. As Braman, a neo-realist, says, “Even though reality may not exist, we have a right to it.” (Braman, 2007: 281)

Meanwhile, revolutionary critical pedagogues such as Hill have defended their position against postmodern and reformist accusations:
The creation of true social justice within capitalism is not viable ... no capitalist class is going to give up its economic and political power willingly. Improvements in the relative position of the working class are brought about by class struggle, not by appeals to social justice, however much such appeals might aid that struggle in particular circumstances.

(Hill, 2007b: end note; see also Kachur, 2012; Malott, 2014)

For critical revolutionary theorists, critical pedagogy should concern itself primarily with educating for the overthrow of capitalism and should be linked firmly with the wider revolutionary movement. Clearly, this question of the role and function of critical pedagogy is bound up with the wider Marxist questions about the role of the vanguard, transitional programmes, the relative merits of parliamentary reform and revolution, and the relationship between Marxist activism and other kinds of activism (for example, anarchist activism, or the decentred activism of groups like Occupy). Hill’s position on these questions is now straightforwardly Trotskyist, in that he has come to welcome working alongside other (non-revolutionary) activists and critical pedagogues in a counter-hegemonic bloc as a transitional stratagem preliminary to the development of class consciousness and transformation of capitalism into socialism (Hill, 2012).

My particular interest in this thesis is in critical pedagogy as a response to neoliberalism, and as such I am especially interested in Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches to critical pedagogy alongside cultural critiques about the role of civil society in providing a counter-hegemonic discourse to support critical pedagogy. I am concerned with those critical pedagogies that address issues of economic power and powerlessness within neoliberalism; in other words, my primary interest is in pedagogies that address issues of class rather than issues of, for instance, ethnicity, post-colonialism or gender. I recognise that these latter issues are also thrown into sharp relief under free market fundamentalism: for instance, global neoliberalism operates through institutions such as the World Bank, the OECD and the IMF and transnational corporations, all of which have imposed structural readjustment programmes upon nations of the global south in ways which are arguably imperialist and racist (Klein, 2008). I am interested in the exposure of inequalities of power with an economic base, since I view neoliberalism as the primary and most significant ideological source of inequality in the contemporary world. Insofar as these inequalities are manifest in gendered and raced power imbalances, then they fall within the remit of this thesis. However, I do not necessarily want to suggest that all imbalances of power in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and so forth are primarily economic imbalances, or are rooted in certain forms of capitalism. It may well be, for instance, that patriarchy is prior to capitalism as a form of oppression and exploitation, or that racism is prior and that capitalism could not have developed as it did without a fundamentally racist and imperialist attitude underpinning the process of
capital accumulation. Different forms of power imbalance articulate with and magnify one another in complex intersectional webs (so that to be a working class black woman in a neoliberal racist patriarchal world is to be in a particularly difficult position). Indeed, Apple maintains that a critical approach which does not include issues of race and gender alongside class is incomplete and reductive (Apple, 2013). However, the debate between, say, critical race theory and critical Marxist analyses is beyond the scope of this thesis; critical interests can work in parallel as well as in concert. Different critical theorists inevitably have different political interests – the point is to expose oppressive practices (whether of neoliberalism, colonialism or patriarchy) according to one’s interests and abilities, rather than to attack other critical approaches for not being exhaustive3. Here, I am primarily interested in ways in which educators use critical pedagogy to question the hegemony of neoliberalism (and the policies and view of human nature it promotes and the ontological and epistemological assumptions it rests upon) rather than those of patriarchy or racism. Further, whilst my own position is broadly revolutionary socialist, this thesis includes teachers who employ critical pedagogy with various goals and none in mind: I do not assume that participants support revolutionary critical pedagogy in particular. Participants are all involved in critical pedagogy as a response to neoliberalism, but this takes various forms.

It should also be noted at this stage that, as with so much of the language of emancipation, the language of critical pedagogy has been co-opted by the right. This works in at least two ways: first, there are conservative critical thinkers who claim to teach critically and who do actually deploy methods of criticality such as dialectical thinking. Some of these may have no further aim in mind than the development of ‘critical thinking’ skills; some may wish to transform the current form of neoliberal capitalism into the kind of radical communitarian ‘Red Toryism’ advocated by Philip Blond (2010), amongst others. In the context of this thesis, if a participant had simply advocated the deployment of critical skills without any intention of bringing about social change, then this would not be of current interest. As it happened, none of the participants were advocating Red Toryism as an alternative to neoliberalism, but had they done so, then that would have been within the current remit, since it would have been a form of critical pedagogy addressing the particular power relationships under neoliberalism.

3 The debate is comparable to that which surfaces with regularity within feminism: radical feminism is accused of not taking into account black feminism(s) or disabled feminism(s); separatist feminists exclude feminists who welcome transnegendered people as women; sex-positive feminists exclude those feminists who consider the sex industry to be exploitative and patriarchal. One would think feminists were the problem, rather than patriarchy.
However, there is a second way in which the language of critical pedagogy has been co-opted, and this is more problematic. It can be illustrated, for example, by my own experience several years ago in a FE college as a new teacher educator and course leader of a B.A. in Education and Training. I have taught in FE settings since 2004, and in 2009 moved from a sixth form college to a college of Further and Higher Education. This move was prompted in part by my belief that FE colleges had an ethos of providing ‘second chances’ for those who had been marginalised and disaffected in schools and that such colleges had traditionally had links to the working class movement and to socialist and Marxist ideals. Steele and Taylor have commented that, “Adult education has been one of the most important areas for Marxist educators” (Steele and Taylor, 2004:579), and I anticipated finding a politically and pedagogically like-minded community of practice when I changed jobs in 2009. As a left-wing Quaker with an interest in political activism and the transformational potential of education, I was looking forward to working in an environment where critical pedagogy was, if not the norm, at least recognised and supported.

I was very hopeful about the potential of the practice of reflection advocated in module handbooks for the courses I was teaching, and I recognised the vocabulary of transformation and consciousness-raising as part of the lexis of critical pedagogy. However, I was surprised to note the absence of, say, Freire, Habermas, Marcuse, Althusser, Horkheimer and even Marx on any of the university B.A. Education and Training recommended reading lists (e.g. University of Huddersfield, 2009: 2-3) connected with transformational learning. Instead, the lists were populated by writers such as Moon (2004) and Cottrell (2003). This lack of criticality in Initial Teacher Education has also been commented on by Atkins:

A move to a more critical and socially just pedagogy in the sector is predicated on teachers having a broad understanding of the social positioning of their students and of the societal, economic and educational structures which constrain them. However, the development of such understandings and knowledge is inconsistent with the contemporary, standards led ITE programmes, which does not address any of the fundamental social and political issues in FE and which is wholly based on an acquisition model of learning.

(Atkins, 2011: 3)

Moreover, it seemed clear to me that the context in which I was now working was not actually necessarily sympathetic to critical approaches to education. In fact, I soon realised that the FE sector is extremely marketised, performative and instrumental, driven by policies based on a thoroughgoing neoliberal outlook. One example of how this impacted on pedagogical practice and the curriculum was when I approached a (college) colleague to discuss the possibility of including some critical (e.g. neo-Marxist
and Foucauldian) approaches to the topic of reflection on the teacher education programmes; I was told clearly that this would be “too difficult” for our trainees and that we should stick to what had been taught before¹. Interestingly, the subtext seemed to be that giving students access to critical traditions would actually exclude them since these ideas were somehow fancily intellectual. Paradoxically, of course, such anti-educative practices have a central role to play in class formation and disempowerment.

I became intrigued by the way in which the language of critical pedagogy around reflection had been captured by antithetical ideological perspectives such as that of neoliberalism and concurred with Gur-Ze’ev (2001), who argues that:

These educational versions and concepts of reflection ... ultimately profess a kind of subjectivism which is only too well suited to the globalization of capitalist production and consumption.

(Gur-Ze’ev, 2001:103)

A similar suspicion of contemporary usage of terms previously associated with critical pedagogy – including ‘social justice’ – is echoed by Zeichner and Flessner (2010) who suggest that:

One danger of the sloganizing that has emerged around the concept of social justice in teacher education is that the term will lose any specific meaning and will come to justify and frame teacher education efforts that represent a variety of ideological and political commitments, not all of them critical of the current social order or representing a change from the status quo. This has been the fate of other slogans in teacher education, such as reflection and professional development.

(Zeichner and Flessner, 2009: 296-297; see also Avis, 1991)

The malleability of critical terms in a neoliberal context is further illustrated, for instance, by the use of social justice rhetoric by the Teach First organisation (Teach First, 2010), or by David Cameron’s co-option of the term ‘progressive’ (Seymour, 2010: 62f; see also Avis, 1991 for an extended discussion of the different political interpretations of the term ‘progressive’.). The cognitive dissonance produced by the neoliberal co-option of the language of social justice is disorientating to those who accept the rhetoric of empowerment in good faith and who might subsequently feel exposed or betrayed within a positivist institutional framework which uses language in very different ways. Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 88), amongst others, have described the ways in which discourse around ‘freedom’ and ‘justice’ have different meanings within social democratic and neoliberal discourse, and similar shifts in meaning occur around the rhetoric of justice, equality,

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¹ As it happens, later on I had the chance to work with a university colleague to develop an entire core module on Critical Education on the B.A. in Education and Professional Development; it would be very good to see further such initiatives developed in Teacher Education programmes.
reflection and empowerment when these terms are transferred from critical discourse to neoliberal discourse. For instance, reflection with the Freirean tradition refers to the process of reflecting upon the structures of society in order to discover power imbalances and inequities so that one might change these structures in the direction of greater equality and social justice. Reflection within the positivist, neoliberal discourse of (for example) current pedagogy within F.E. teacher training, however, largely means reflecting upon one’s own shortcomings to overcome them in order to achieve institutional targets and outcomes. That these two interpretations of reflection are potentially antithetical is clear: one is focussed outwards upon the transformation of social structures, whilst the other focuses inwards upon the transformation of the individual (in the Foucauldian sense of the self-surveillance of the individual as s/he is constituted as a docile worker).

Landy draws upon Gramsci to express a similar sense of disquiet and recommends, “a critical understanding of the antagonisms and contradictions rather than their pacification through confessional narratives” that would “explode the genre of the confessional” (Landy, 2011: 49), which is bound to strike anyone with a critical disposition as an excellent plan. Interestingly, Landy links this confessional tendency with the rise of postmodernism and identity politics, both of which, arguably, underpin a spurious and disempowering focus upon individuals, which has helped to facilitate the rise of neoliberalism and its co-optation of the language of social justice. She writes:

Barthes, Foucault⁵, Bakhtin, Derrida, and other critical theorists are invoked as pedagogical models in the emphasis on self-shaping. On one hand, these concerns seem to have a political concern at their base, the liberal concern with addressing the “culturally disenfranchised,” but on the other hand, the form of this enfranchisement is dependent on modes of endless self-reflection and of eclecticism which obscure the constituencies and the very differences that such programs claim to address, bereft as they are of any sense of history and of critical analysis. Insofar as they have succeeded, they have reinforced the ideology of competence and the interests of power and social containment of conflict. One aspect of a Gramscian analysis would be to understand the contradictory position of this movement, to see what interests it serves, to expose its cooptation of the language of change in the form of “pop psych.”

( Ibid. 51)

⁵ Landy is wrong to include Foucault here: Foucault is intensely critical himself of the kind of pop psychology and confessional culture Landy describes, as she herself points out on p48.
It is instructive to apply Splichal’s grid to the current practice of reflection within education:

**Fig. 2: Analytic grid: reflection**

![Analytic grid: reflection](image-url)

Part of the argument of this thesis is that neoliberalism renders invisible what should be visible and exposes what should be private in a transposition of the public and private spheres, the better to maintain and protect from critique the position of the powerful and the easier to control the powerless. Critical reflection in the public sphere ought to be about the rational and dialectical critique of public institutions – this is what democracy demands be located in the upper right quadrant. Individual attitudes and values are what should remain private, below the line. Were this the case, the self would be constituted as a rational, democratically-engaged, active citizen, unafraid to join in free debate and confident that one’s personal beliefs would remain private.

The grid makes it possible to see how the vocabulary of social justice that properly attaches itself to a discussion of censorship in the bottom half of the grid has actually been translated inappropriately (for ideological purposes) into the top half of the grid. So, where those concerned with social justice might justifiably call for an end to the silence imposed on socially excluded individuals (bottom left), a totalising state (or corporation) now uses the same language to justify its intrusion into the private life of individuals (top left). The Habermasian or Freirean project of giving voice to the excluded works in favour of social justice only if applied in the bottom left quadrant; when applied or imposed above the horizontal axis it become a project of exposure and spectacle. Giving voice to the unvoiced becomes an abuse of state power, a repressive
imposition of visibility. Unless there is a recognition of the structures of power-knowledge within which voices are heard, giving voice can be a technology of surveillance. As Zembylas and Michaelides note:

the tendency to push some groups to reclaim their voices is not necessarily liberating to them or an indication of “good” ethics on the part of those who take this initiative.

(Zembylas and Michaelides, 2004: 209)

Using Splichal’s analytic method, it can also be seen how propaganda – the misleading use of the rhetoric of radical pedagogy by a totalising state, for instance – articulates with the functions of imposition of visibility (upon the thoughts of citizens) and suppression of visibility (of dissenting voices). Propaganda is used by the powerful to conceal their true interests and intentions, which are simply to maintain their own power and defend their own interests. Hence, discourse connected with radical pedagogy conceals the state’s true intention of exposing and thereby rendering impotent any possible arena for dissent.

Of course, in terms of the present thesis, this re-articulation (or recuperation) of concepts such as ‘social justice’ and ‘equality’ under neoliberalism brings with it particular difficulties of interpretation, operationalisation of concepts and selection of a purposive sample. Are there any teachers who would claim not to be working in the interests of justice and equality, using reflection as a pedagogic tool? If even David Cameron and Teach First are ‘progressive’ these days, then it seems likely, as Avis argued (Avis, 1991) that such terms mean quite different things to quite different people. Clearly, the discourse in which such terms are situated makes all the difference. For this thesis, then, it was essential to adopt a methodology that would investigate not just teachers’ examples of critical pedagogy in the classroom, but also the broader theoretical and political dispositions and references of the teachers concerned. This issue is addressed further in my section on methodology. Here, suffice to say that one interview was not usable for this thesis since it became obvious that the participant’s interpretation of critical pedagogy meant increasing her (immigrant) students’ chances of success within the confines of a neoliberal capitalist economic system. For instance, this participant said:

I see my job as trying to increase their chances to survive, economically. So we might discuss how they can set up a business.

In this case, the interviewee’s aims of improving life chances for her students was no doubt laudable, but her view was quite clearly that her job was to help the students adjust to and succeed within the current economic system, rather than to question the system. I might have done the same in her situation but this kind of teaching is not what
is considered as critical pedagogy for the purposes of this thesis. This thesis attempts, in the words of Landy, to identify:

**New strategies and tactics that can constitute effective forms of political subversion that do more than serve prevailing institutional interests which can easily deflect oppositional strategies by incorporating and silencing them.**

(Landy, 2011: 42)

### 1.3.6 Further Education in England

This thesis focuses on English Further Education (including A level teaching – it is sometimes forgotten that A levels are taught in many FE colleges) for four reasons in particular:

1. The FE sector is a notoriously performative, marketised part of the ‘knowledge economy’ (Orr, 2009: 89; Simmons, 2010) and I am interested in the ways in which critical pedagogy can survive and prosper in these hostile circumstances. The particular circumstances have been outlined by Simmons (2013), amongst others, and include: the ‘liberation’ of colleges from Local Authority control and their incorporation in 1993; the subsequent strengthening of an audit culture and a culture of surveillance; an increased focus on human capital rather than human creativity; an increased emphasis on results and league tables; a view of knowledge as instrumental and utilitarian rather than valuable for its own sake or because it enhances human life; a view that education is a private good rather than a public good; and the intensification of the rhetoric around the need for ‘world class’ skills in a competitive globalised economy.

Avis (2004, 2005) saw potential for the development of activist professionals within F.E., especially if trainee teachers and others could make the turn from an individualist ethic to a structural critique. However, at that time government policy was (arguably) to strengthen (very limited) notions of professionalism within F.E. teaching; we now have a government that sees teaching as a ‘craft’ rather than a profession and that, when in coalition as the previous government, rescinded the requirement for FE teachers to have a teaching qualification (Simmons, 2013: 88). Has this deprofessionalisation sapped the radical potential of F.E. teaching, or is it still possible to find examples of critical pedagogy?

2. Related to the first reason: the previous and current governments’ education reforms are moving increasingly towards privatisation of the education system; government policies seem likely to increase class differences in educational attainment and to reduce social mobility still further. Simmons has written of the extensive funding cuts in the sector:
The Coalition’s regime of extreme cost-cutting … has, so far, included scrapping the Educational Maintenance Allowance for 16-18 year olds; removing all public funding for those studying level 3 courses over the age of 24; ending the entitlement for people over the age of 25 to take a first level 2 qualification free of charge; and pulling the plug on various college building projects. All this is set against overall reductions in funding of over 25%, on-going programmes of restructuring, redundancies, and a culture of ‘more for less’ across the FE sector.

(Simmons, 2013: 89-90)

The semi-rural college where I worked in 2012 experienced a drop in applications as some students could not afford to travel to college or to have lunch if they got there. Some students who were midway through their courses dropped out as their debts mounted and they found themselves unable to pay for transport to college. Those students who did come to college were faced with the prospect of massively increased tuition fees if they decided to go to university. In 2015, with a new Conservative government leading education policy for the next five years, we are already faced with extensive funding cuts in 16-18 education and an intensification of surveillance and control in colleges under the Prevent counter-terrorism strategy (DfE, 2015). How will critical educators help students to face the current policy and funding landscape?

3) A pragmatic reason: I have worked in FE for a number of years and so have access to a range of participants. I have worked both in sixth form colleges and colleges of further and higher education. I have taught RS, Sociology and Citizenship and through this have access to a number of colleagues teaching a range of subjects in my former institutions and elsewhere. I have also trained teachers to teach in post-compulsory education and been the course leader for a degree in education. Again, this gives me access to a wide range of participants in a number of institutions.

4) FE can go some way to fulfilling hooks’ wish (hooks, op.cit.) for a cross-boundary dialogue in terms of subjects taught, ages of students taught and levels of education taught. Teachers in FE, for instance, may be teaching A level Government and Politics or level 2 Hair and Beauty or a Foundation Degree in Aviation or English to immigrant Pakistani-origin women. The sample I have identified includes five A level teachers (of History, Sociology, Photography, French, and Government and Politics), one ESOL teacher, one functional skills numeracy teacher, one teacher of Health and Social Care, one lecturer with responsibility for Equality and Diversity and one literacy support tutor. Although Simmons (2013) has pointed out that the FE sector is becoming increasingly stratified (for instance, with A levels having higher status than vocational qualifications), there is certainly potential for teachers in the sector to work together in trans-disciplinary ways which circumvent the neoliberal fragmentation of knowledge into decontextualized silos. The sector, though changing rapidly, is still broad-spectrum. This
thesis therefore tries to show where there are links and areas of commonality to be built upon in the sharing of good critical pedagogical practice.

1.4 Chapter conclusion

In the context of an intensification of neoliberalism and a resulting resurgence of interest in critical pedagogy, this thesis considers the motives and practices of a number of critical educators in FE in northern England. It contends that a Splichalian analysis of this material supports the idea that critical approaches in education (and elsewhere) can be a continuation of the Enlightenment project but with an added recognition of the dangers of public visibility and censorship produced by a neoliberal hegemony which has effectively reversed the values of the Enlightenment in order to conceal the interests of the powerful and expose the working classes to disciplinary scrutiny. Spichal’s analytic grid shows that the censoring state is certainly not neutral and that there certainly are alternatives; these alternatives can be located by reinstating the priority given in the Enlightenment to the use of critical reason with the emphasis on the need to question power and vested interests. In terms of neoliberalism, these interests are primarily those of the capitalist classes and so the main interest of this thesis is to investigate those critical pedagogues who seek to expose the neoliberal capitalist hegemony and to empower their students by helping them to lift the veil that obscures their true position in a system which does not operate in their interests.
Chapter two: approach and method

2.1 Outline of the chapter

This chapter describes the critical approach and interpretivist perspective taken in the thesis before proceeding to a consideration and justification of the methods of data collection (a three stage approach with semi-structured interviews at the centre) and analysis (based on Green et al’s recommendations (2007) for conducting thematic analysis). The chapter addresses some of the epistemological and ontological concerns underpinning the thesis. It is multi-layered, since questions of epistemology and ontology surface in the thesis not only in relation to method but also to substantive content, in that the thesis examines critical pedagogy, the roles of reason and knowledge and (through a consideration of Splichal) boundaries between the public and the private realms.

2.2 Approach and perspective

My approach is based upon an interpretivist and critical analysis of qualitative data, with theoretical influences from Marxist and ‘Splichalian’ analyses of power. The interpretivist aspect of my approach underpins the presentation and analysis of participants’ narratives, meanings, stories and interpretations. I am interested in the ways in which colleagues construct, describe and interpret counter-hegemonic critical spaces in their teaching. The critical aspect of my approach supports the intention to ‘come off the fence’ and produce research that is of practical value in helping to inform and facilitate pedagogical practice that aims for social justice. Denzin has referred to, “critical qualitative approaches which disrupt and destabilize current public policy or social discourse” (Denzin, 2009: 142) and this counterhegemonic emphasis runs throughout this thesis.

One can, through a critical approach (in pedagogy or in research), gain knowledge which is useful, explanatory and less partial than ‘uncriticised’ ‘knowledge’; critical approaches attempt to shine more lights and to question power structures, whilst recognising the provisionality of all positions (Robinson, 2010). My approach is critical in that it seeks to uncover power relations embedded in dominant, hegemonic educational practices (and the ontology and epistemology underpinning them). The critical research method is one that includes constant dialectical checking: reflection on and interpretation of the data produces a thesis, checking of the thesis (through inter-rater checking of codes, for example, or through a discursive and reflexive stage in where participants are asked to
comment on interpretations) is the antithesis which prompts a further synthesis. Moreover, as outlined in the first chapter, critical research aims to produce not just new knowledge but also to lead to collaborative action in the interests of social justice.

The epistemological approach that enables both critical pedagogy and critical research to proceed is inductive critical reason, or the use of a dialectical logic to get closer to the truth. Deductive reasoning is quite different – deductive logic aims for certainty and is not critical or dialectical, although of course it produces powerful knowledge such as mathematics. Further discussion of the differences between dialectical and deductive logic can be found in Brown (1979:134). In inductive enquiry, the synthesis (in both critical research and critical pedagogy) becomes the thesis in turn, so the process leads to provisional knowledge rather than to certainty. There is no reason why the dialectical process should assume an end. Marx did assume this, of course, and so did Plato, but the process itself can be used without the assumption of a logical conclusion. In fact, when data is empirical this is precisely the process which underpins scientific enquiry. It is only when deductive logic transforms the dialectical method into syllogisms that any attempt at certainty is implied; so long as methods are inductive, probability and provisionality are the end points. As Harari says:

Dialectical arguments are aimed at conviction (pistis) ... Dialectical induction is an argument intended to convince an opponent by appealing to particular instances.

(Harari, 2004: 22-23)

_Pistis_ is an epistemological category in Greek thought denoting conviction or well-founded belief; it contrasts with _eikasia_, which is ‘imagining’; it also contrasts with _dianoia_ (mathematical reasoning) and _noesis_ (knowledge) in that only these latter two are states of certainty.

Approaches based upon critical reasoning have sometimes been criticised for assuming some kind of objectivity or unquestioned neutrality; in fact inductive critical dialectics are very well suited to the uncovering of power structures at play and to the recognition of the embeddedness and constructed nature of knowledge. Just because Kant did not see the use of reason in this way, it doesn’t mean the whole rational project is suspect; indeed, the work of the Frankfurt school and of Habermas can be seen as an attempt precisely to use critical rationality to address issues of power. After all, if we abandon reason as the means by which we expose power and move towards less partisan

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6 The assumption being that in a completely equal society, knowledge would not be embedded in unequal power relations and would therefore be pure; however, human beings are not simply static, rational entities and relationships and forms of culture are constantly imbued with power struggles in different respects.
knowledge, we are left with some kind of free-floating relativist postmodernism which is incapable of addressing the desirability of change in the interests of social justice.

Inductive critical dialectics, therefore, does not position itself as disinterested in terms of power relations and it does not assume that any thesis transcends the conditions of the production of knowledge; it does, however, provide a means for moving the thesis beyond any particular (power-infused) set of conditions of production. The postmodern critique of critical rational inquiry has no power in relation to inductive critical processes.

The use of inductive critical reason is clearly a process or epistemological tool; its use does not imply any particular ontological perspective in relation to reified categories of cognition. One might be a realist or not in this regard, and still use critical reason as a tool. Kant’s transcendental idealism, of course, posits that the basic categories of experience which are required for reasoning are both built into the human mind and in fact correspond with aspects of reality such as time, space and causality (Kant, 1978). But one need not have any such ontological assumptions in order simply to practise critical reason – one can assume it is bringing one closer to the truth, or that truth is eternally co-created in the dialectic. In order to establish with certainty whether or not the natural or social worlds do objectively correspond to our notions about them, we would have to use deductive logic, as Kant did, and, frankly, if Kant has not proved the existence of the world *a priori* then it may be an unsolvable dilemma.

In sum, my position is that critical reasoning does not necessarily imply one ontological position or another; that it is the best epistemological tool for developing our knowledge and critiquing power structures and that this is so in terms both of research and pedagogy.

More, my thesis suggests that it is precisely in the downgrading of critical reason that ideological state apparatuses such as education and the media are able to perpetuate oppressive neoliberal power relations (and, incidentally, postmodernism is therefore the academic handmaiden of neoliberalism). My use of Splichal’s analytic grid shows that those epistemological methods which ought properly to be in the public sphere – the public use of reason – are censored by current educational and other cultural practices which prioritise the superficial and expose the individual.

The table below summarises some of the key methodological and philosophical terms used in this thesis, some of which are more fully explained in the section on the presentation and analysis of data on p 65.
Table 2: key terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key term</th>
<th>Epistemological process</th>
<th>Ontological assumptions</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>empiricism</td>
<td>Observation; induction</td>
<td>Can be realist or not but aiming for probability not certainty</td>
<td>Empirical data can be numbers or anything observable – conversations, dances, whatever; synthetic and <em>a posteriori</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rationalism</td>
<td>Logic; deductive reasoning</td>
<td>Absolutist, aiming for certainty</td>
<td>Usually analytic and <em>a priori</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dialectical reasoning</td>
<td>Dialectics</td>
<td>If the data inputted is empirical, then the method is aiming for probability and the outcome is provisional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical reason</td>
<td>Dialectics plus an awareness of power structures informing the empirical data</td>
<td>Can be realist (Marx, for instance) or non-realist or agnostic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical research</td>
<td>Awareness of power structures underpinning data plus a desire to work for social justice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical pedagogy</td>
<td>Teaching so that one encourages students to become</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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7 Kant proposes that categories of experience are synthetic *a priori*; however, the content of knowledge is usually described in philosophical terms as analytic *a priori* or synthetic *a posteriori* (Kant, 1978)
aware of the power structures in order to work towards social justice. The teaching most likely includes dialectical methods.

**Marxist or revolutionary critical pedagogy**
- As above, with class consciousness primary

**positivism**
- Quantitative: counting the data and analysing statistical patterns and causal relationships
- Usually associated with a realist perspective (though there is no necessary realist logic underlying this approach)

**interpretivism**
- Qualitative: analysing themes
- Usually associated with the view that social reality is a construct

## 2.3 Method

### 2.3.1 Data collection instrument

I used methodological triangulation (Bell, 2005: 116) in order to gather rich, multi-layered, valid data from participants and, as noted, to reduce the possibility of researcher bias in interpretation of the data. I used a three-stage approach to data collection, paralleling stages used by Ollin (2008) in her investigation of the use of silence in the classroom.

**2.3.1a Stages 1 and 2**: Participants were supplied with a participant information sheet and a list of questions (appendix 1) to be covered during semi-structured interviews. I wanted to give participants an opportunity to reflect deeply on the interview questions and so I followed Ollin’s method (2008) and decided to issue interviewees with the question schedule beforehand so that they had time to think things over. This did seem to work well and, in the event, some participants actually wrote down *aides mémoires*.
and brought them to the interview. Some of the concepts to be operationalised during the research were relatively complex (including ‘critical pedagogy’ itself) and I felt that by supplying participants with key areas for discussion ahead of the interview, they would have a chance to consider precise and thoughtful responses and that this stage therefore would increase the likelihood of gathering valid and detailed information during the interview process. The opportunity to reflect upon the questions in private ahead of the interviews also reduced any potential for the Hawthorne effect. The list of questions was given out three weeks ahead of the interviews; the accompanying participant information sheet explained the purpose of the research, the participants’ right to withdraw, and details connected with the location, timing and recording of the interviews.

I considered giving participants the choice of responding to the stage 1 questions in written form or in semi-structured interviews based on the themes and questions already supplied but with the opportunity to explore further themes as raised by the interviewee. The option of responding by questionnaire alone would have added a further layer of anonymity and confidentiality. However, oral and written evidence can be very different in nature and for this reason I opted to interview all respondents, though I encouraged them to bring any notes they wished to the interview.

Giving the respondents time to reflect and prepare resulted in rich and nuanced data; collecting data at interview facilitated a collaborative process and the opportunity for me as the interviewer to explore fresh leads as and when they arose, which they frequently did. Inductive probing is singled out by Guest et al (2012:13) as a particular strength of methods such as semi-structured interviews, and they link it with the capacity to give voice to the ‘other’ and to enable participants to tell their own story.

I also considered using a focus group as a data collection instrument since this would provide rich, collaboratively-produced data and would help to produce new themes and operationalise concepts (for example, some members of the group might explain their understanding of key concepts in ways that prompted more informed responses from others). However, given that potential participants were dispersed throughout the North of England, a focus group would have been very difficult to organise. Also, there would have been complex issues of anonymity and confidentiality to address in a focus group. The aspect of collaboration, important to critical research, is supplied instead by the third stage of data collection, where I gave participants the opportunity to comment in depth upon ways in which I had presented and interpreted data.

The data collection instrument was piloted in order to check its design and whether it would gain the data I was interested in. I chose to pilot the process on a former
colleague who had taught research methods and education policy and whose comments would therefore be those of a very knowledgeable participant. As a result, some slight changes to wording in questions were made. The most significant change was in respect of question 7. This had originally simply asked, ‘Could you tell me a little more about your sources of inspiration in your practice of critical pedagogy?’ During the pilot study, it became clear that this question needed considerable expansion in order to become intelligible and valid. Once it had been revised, this question proved to be one which most participants found very stimulating.

In composing the list of questions to be used in the interviews, I was mindful of the need to begin with a general question which would ease participants into the discussion. It was then imperative to ensure that key concepts (‘neoliberalism’ and ‘critical pedagogy’) were being operationalised in a way that would provide valid data, and so I next included questions exploring participants’ understanding of these terms.

Since one of the major aims of the research was to find out how teachers maintain a practice of critical pedagogy with the current neoliberal policy context and environment, I decided next to ask participants directly about how this context impacts upon their practice, and two questions exploring this followed. I kept the wording of the questions open as I did not want to ask leading questions and assume that participants would find the current educational environment problematic.

Next, I wanted to find out more about participants’ motivations and inspirations for engaging in critical pedagogy, and questions 6 and 7 addressed this aim. Question 8 then addressed the practicalities of how teachers actually engage in critical pedagogy – what activities, resources and teaching methods did they use? Next, bearing in mind the intention to develop practical outcomes from the research in terms of the establishment of a group of critical educators who could share ideas, I wanted to know whether my participants could think of anything that might help them to develop their critical pedagogy further, and so the next question addressed this. Finally, knowing that my participants were an extremely experienced and well-informed set of individuals, I left the last question completely open – did they want to add anything?

Interviews were conducted over three months in 2011 in a variety of locations, including at my home, in my office and at participants’ places of work. Much care was taken around confidentiality and privacy and I tried to make the interview environment as congenial and welcoming as possible so that it would be easier to establish a rapport with my participants. In the event, establishing a rapport was very straightforward and a strength of the research process – I knew most of the participants well and had a pre-existing rapport with most of them. One participant brought her baby with her and this
added to the sense of informality! I think participants felt that the interviews were like an interesting chat with a friend – we all have these interests and talk about this kind of thing anyway, so it had a good deal of ecological validity. The interviews felt like more intense, thought-through versions of the sorts of conversations I would have with these people in any case. For example, one of the teachers and I have had a decade-long discussion about the origins of moral values; another was in the Socialist Workers’ Party, as was I at the time, and the interview was not dissimilar from conversations I would have with him in the natural course of things.

Interviews varied in length from around thirty minutes to around two hours and were, with the participants’ permission, recorded on a Flip camera. This enabled me to concentrate fully on the participant during the interview; there was no need to make notes as we went along and I did not have to rely upon my memory of the interview to make notes after the event. It enabled me to be extremely attentive to what was being said and to follow up interesting new information and leads with prompts.

Interviews were transcribed by me as soon as possible and in all cases within 24 hours of the interview taking place. This immersion in the data was immensely useful and productive and enabled me to feel very familiar with my participants’ responses, even before the coding stage of analysis.

2.3.1b Stage 3: As noted, in order to strengthen the collaborative aspect of the research, I wanted to undertake a reflexive dialogue to give participants the chance to:

- discuss the research process and the interview process, as well as providing an opportunity for them to examine and question the research data, extending the potential richness of the data.

(Ollin, 2008: 270)

There were several reasons for including this final stage. As noted above, it was a chance to check the validity of the data and its representation and interpretation in the research. As Sparkes says:

No textual staging can ever be innocent. Whose voices are included in the text, and how they are given weight and interpreted, along with questions of priority and juxtaposition, are not just textual strategies but are political concerns that have moral consequences.

(Sparkes, 1995:159)

The reflexive stage also resonates with the theme of collaboration and co-construction of knowledge within critical education theory, and with the idea that:
the role of an educational researcher is always to work in specific circumstances with rather than on or even for the people who inhabit them.

(Griffiths, 1998:111)

My initial plan was to meet participants again in order to have a further unstructured discussion about their responses and my presentation and interpretation of what they had said. However, this proved impractical because of the passage of time – the interviews took place in 2011 and the final stage of data collection in 2013. Some participants had moved on from their previous occupations; some had moved away; I had changed jobs and moved away too. Finally, I decided to contact participants by email, asking for comments. Although not ideal in some ways (e.g. less opportunity to establish rapport this time), this method did allow for participants to reflect at leisure before responding, and it did provide a complement to the previous two stages. I was also able to follow up questions and ask for clarifications during several emails in some cases.

I emailed participants chapter three of the thesis as it then stood, which outlined the analysis of the results based on the interviews, and simply asked if they had any comments, suggestions or anything to add.

There was some sample attrition, which was to be expected, given the length of time that had passed. Eight out of ten participants responded. Of the remaining two, one said that she was having to re-apply for her own job following a restructure at work. She said she would get back to me once things had settled down but I emailed immediately and said she should concentrate on her own position and not to worry about the thesis. The final participant did not email any further comments.

2.3.2 Sampling

In terms of sampling, I have followed the example of Ollin (2008) and used a purposive sample of informed participants for my research. Ollin says of her research:

As the nature of the study was related primarily to the meanings and perceptions of individuals, a purposive approach was used, ... oriented towards the selection of participants who would provide the richest sources of data and generating instances which displayed a wide variety of perspectives to illuminate the research question and to capture central themes which cut across variations in participants.

(Ollin, 2008: 269)

My initial sample consisted of ten teachers and lecturers from a range of settings connected with Further Education in England. The settings of the participants include FE colleges, private training companies and sixth form colleges. All of the settings are within
the north of England (North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and Lancashire) and include a small, rural FE college in a conservative farming community, a large FE college in a cosmopolitan university town, a sixth form college in a coastal resort town and a private training company in an economically deprived, ethnically diverse city.

All ten initial participants were known to me and had already signalled an interest in critical pedagogy in their various professional settings. That someone did in fact use critical pedagogy in some connection to FE was the key criterion for participating in the research. As already noted, one participant’s data was not used because of a difference in the operationalisation of the concept of critical pedagogy.

I knew some of the participants professionally and some through participation in common political activities and groups (e.g. the Socialist Workers’ Party and the Universities and Colleges Union). I initially considered snowball sampling and asking each of my initial sample to recommend further people for interview, as I was aware that many of my participants were involved in the kinds of educational and political activities that might well bring them into contact with others with an interest in critical pedagogy throughout the north of England. However, the interviews produced very rich data and certainly indicated that ten participants would be more than enough to supply a sufficient quantity of data for interpretative analysis for the purposes of my thesis. I therefore decided that when it came to one of the practical aims of the research – the establishment of a group of critical educators in the north of England – I would encourage my participants to invite others whom they knew had an interest in critical pedagogy and related concerns to join us at that stage.

I did not stratify the sample in any deliberate sense but in fact it did include a range of ages and both sexes. The following table shows the level of education, age and gender distribution of the sample:

Table 3: sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gender</th>
<th>age</th>
<th>education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>60s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>60s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>40s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>50s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All ten participants were initially contacted by me via email, which gave a brief outline of my research interests and asked participants whether they might be interested in receiving a participant information sheet. All ten agreed to take part.

2.3.3 Reliability and validity

The research is not based on a representative sample of Further Education teachers but by involving participants from a range of settings I hope to have increased the external validity, representativeness and generalisability of the study. However, what the participants said in interviews is probably quite representative of similar conversations had by critical educators everywhere in response to an intensification of neoliberalism.

I was not aiming for robust reliability in the study, since my approach is interpretivist and I agree with Denzin (2009) that different research approaches should be judged on criteria appropriate to them\(^8\); nonetheless, reliability was increased by checking codes with a colleague and monitoring and discussing inter-coder agreements and disagreements.

Construct validity is of much greater significance in this research than reliability. Construct validity can be affected by the position of the researcher and by factors such as researcher bias, demand characteristics and the Hawthorne effect. During this research, there were issues connected with my own positionality in the research process, both in connection with my professional relationship with participants (three of whom were my students) and in connection with my own views on the desirability of critical pedagogy and the possible impact of these views upon the research process and the interpretation of data. I gave considerable thought to ways of reducing my own impact on the validity of the results. In respect of the first dilemma, the three students were studying on a degree course on which I was teaching and I have no relationship to them at their places of work. All three are well-established teachers in their forties or fifties, with previous commitments to critical education and social justice in various ways. I made it very clear that the research had no connection with or bearing upon their studies and, in fact, all the interviews were conducted after the students had completed the modules they were studying with me. In respect of the second dilemma, all research is, of course, from a position. Quantitative, positivist approaches make choices at least

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8 Denzin (2009) and others, including Habermas (1972) and Bourdieu (1998), argue that the positivist emphasis upon reliability, generalizability and representativeness are in fact symptomatic of a controlling audit culture and that research which does not meet high standards in these respects may well be robust and trustworthy research on other criteria such as validity and authenticity.
at the level of what to count (Denzin, 2009). Transparency is crucial here and acknowledging one’s own position is the first step. Griffiths writes:

Does having a political or ethical position make the research biased and suspect from the start? Or, as I claim ..., does acknowledging such a position improve the research?

(Griffiths, 1998:3)

Most of the initial participants knew about my academic and political interests in Marxism. Indeed, undertaking research into critical pedagogy within a neoliberal education system arguably presupposes such an interest. My goal was not to investigate whether FE teachers engage in critical education, or how extensive these practices are (both questions which might be susceptible to a positivist enquiry with some concern for 'objectivity'), but to explore how and why teachers engage in such practices.

I discussed issues of power and position with participants up front; they understood the issue and were happy to go ahead. In any case, several of the teachers were much more experienced than and senior to me. In fact, one was my line manager when I first started teaching in sixth forms; another was head of A levels at a college where I taught A levels; issues around power and position were therefore complex and acknowledged.

My own background is imbued with influences from religion, left-wing politics, trade unionism, the academic disciplines of Religious Studies, Citizenship, and Sociology, and a professional context as a lecturer and teacher educator within the English FE system. Recognising this, and not wanting to overplay my own preferences (or miss information outside of my own interests), I decided to try to compensate for any researcher bias by (i) the third stage of data collection and (ii) the use of open coding as the beginning of my interpretation of data. These methods helped to reduce the possibility of selective interpretation of data.

2.3.4 Ethics

This thesis is concerned with views which may run counter to the dominant ethos of participants’ workplaces and so issues of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity were especially important (BERA 2011). Protecting identity at all times was crucial in order to avoid detriment to participants. Most participants said that they thought their critical pedagogy was not welcomed in their institutions – one even said he just locked his door and got on with it. So anonymity was absolutely crucial. Interviews took place in a location of the participant’s choosing – for example, away from the participants’ place of work if they felt this was sensible (seven of the ten respondents chose to be interviewed away from work). I removed as many indications of identity as possible. Transcripts
were anonymised. Voluntary informed consent was gained through issuing a consent form at the bottom of the Participant Information Sheet.

One participant who was also a manager in her college spoke about how painful it was as a manager to impose positivist targets and outcomes on those she managed – she said she hated herself for doing it and was therefore looking to leave management. I was aware that, for her, participating in this research might solidify those feelings. Even though I thought that the feelings of those in management were a really interesting and fruitful line of enquiry, I decided not to explore this further as I did not want to play any part, however small, in prompting people to leave a position on which they depended for their livelihood. I had had experience of this myself some years earlier when a senior (Marxist) colleague’s views on the irredeemable condition of the education system had been instrumental in my decision to leave a perfectly steady, interesting and well-paid job in search of opportunities to teach in situations which resonated more clearly with the values of social justice (whilst the senior, well-paid colleague stayed put till he was eligible to draw his pension). This rather idealistic move had resulted in severe economic hardship for me and my family (I was a single parent and sole breadwinner) and I certainly did not want to encourage anyone else to make a similar step, even if this was simply through encouraging them to reflect more deeply on their position.

Finally, consideration was given to the reduction of ‘bureaucratic burden: as far as possible (BERA, 2011). I tried to arrange interviews at locations convenient for the participant and not during busy times of the academic year (for example, the start of the autumn term or exam periods).

2.4 Method of analysis

The data collected for this thesis is empirical; epistemologically, empiricism does not imply certainty or objectivity, of course, despite the fact that the sociology of knowledge occasionally conflates empiricism with notions of positivism, false claims of objectivity and a naïve assumption of subject-object isomorphism. Empirical data is simply synthetic data which is produced inductively and a posteriori. Epistemologically, empiricism contrasts with rationalism (not interpretivism), which seeks to establish that knowledge is deductive and a priori and which is exemplified by mathematical reasoning and syllogistic logic. It is difficult to know how data used in an interpretivist approach could be anything other than empirical. As both Moore (2007) and Young (2000), amongst others, have made clear, not only are interpretivist complaints about empiricism a misunderstanding of epistemology, but interpretivist complaints about scientific method are a misunderstanding of science, directed against a "straw-man
account of a positivist version of science” (Young, 2000: 529) that few scientists would recognise. Science is precisely not an assertion of certainty, but always of probability.

The use of empirical data likewise does not bind one to a particular ontological position. One could be an empiricist and an ontological realist, holding that the natural world exists and that (a) empiricism will get you there or (b) it will get you closer (Pring’s position, 2004, and, arguably, the dominant scientific paradigm); or one could be an ontological idealist and hold that empirical data is mind-produced but it is all that we have for making sense of phenomena; or one could be an agnostic and hold that, since it’s impossible to transcend our perspective, we can never know whether reality exists. One could be a realist or not regarding the social world and still want empirical data. If a non-realist, then this would be used alongside a recognition that data and interpretations may be all we have.

Empirical data is used by both positivists and interpretivists; the difference in approach is largely about what one does with the data collected rather than the type of data. The former would count the data in some way, perhaps by doing traditional content analysis, and would then present the data in graphs or charts with some kind of statistical analysis. The latter are more likely to use either some kind of thematic analysis, using broad themes rather than small units of narrative, or case study analysis, again without breaking the data down into quantifiable gobbets. It is clear that there is an area where these two analytic approaches merge (how big does a piece of data have to be to suit an interpretivist approach? If an interpretivist starts counting the number of times one of their codes appears, are they merging into positivism?), and that on this boundary there would be a temptation for an interpretivist to tally and quantify their data and to shoehorn it into a positivist framework (as, for example, with Ollin’s work on silence in the classroom, 2008).

2.4.1 Thematic analysis

Decisions about how to present data were complex: on the one hand, case histories would have given context to the data and it is arguable that the type of data given is coherent only as part of a wider narrative about the respondent’s life, since one intent was to draw connections between wider political / religious / other influences and the participants’ educational practices. Lapadat has pointed out that:

Researchers at the interpretivist end of the continuum may argue that the very process of analysis itself—breaking texts into parts to reduce, sort, and label them—fractures the coherence and contextuality of narratives that constitute the data.

(Lapadat, 2010, 4)
To an extent, the data used for this thesis makes more sense when considered as part of a person’s continuous narrative. There would have been more narrative integrity in presenting data in this way. It would have made it easier, for instance, to demonstrate continuity between participants’ influences and motivations and what they actually did in practice, as well as in some cases the consequences of what they did. The trajectories of some of the participants were really very interesting indeed – for example, a couple of them had been at the London School of Economics in the 1960s / 1970s and had been involved in very radical left wing politics for decades. It was fascinating to hear how this had shaped their teaching careers and what they thought of the education system as it changed over the course of several decades from the relatively liberal 1970s to the neoliberal 2010s.

However, in the end, I decided that ethics again had to be my prime consideration and that I needed to present data thematically and with a high degree of anonymity. One or two of the participants lost their jobs during the period I was doing my research and I did not want to put anyone’s job in jeopardy by underlining their radical stances. I did not want to present data in a way which might enable participants to be recognised. Also, using thematic data analysis seemed the best way to proceed, and this did mean splitting data up as I coded it across cases (Khan & VanWynsbergh, 2008). I could have coded so that original narratives could be reassembled, but again, this might have compromised confidentiality and I felt that the need not to cause harm to participants outweighed other considerations. It made ethical sense, therefore, to proceed with coding across cases. Participants are not identified even by letter or number, since it would then be a relatively straightforward task to reconstruct a continuous narrative that might give clues to identity. This is not ideal in many ways but it was the most ethical way of presenting the data. Naturally, I do not think that in practice it is very likely that managers in colleges employing my participants will read this thesis. However, several of the participants were understandably somewhat uneasy about speaking in critical ways about the management and organisation of their workplaces and were reassured when I explained to them how anonymity and confidentiality would be dealt with.

It would also have been possible to present the data in terms of question-by-question analysis. However, apart from questions 2 and 3 (which I wanted to discuss as indications of how participants operationalised the concepts of neoliberalism and critical pedagogy), this seemed an unnecessary and artificial way of delineating what were, in the end, very discursive and full answers to many questions which (as I had hoped) ranged far and wide, beyond the scope of the question itself. So, for instance, a question on practice might prompt further reflections on the policy context; a question on a participant’s background might prompt more information on motivations, and so forth.
Finally, then, I decided that the decision to present and analyse information thematically was the right one and that the presentation and analysis should dissolve the boundaries between questions.

This decision was confirmed when I began formal coding of the transcripts, which certainly indicated that particular themes (e.g. a perception of an increased instrumentalism in education) were discussed in response to several questions.

In the present thesis, the empirical data is qualitative, since it is narrative concerned with interpretations, meanings and experiences, rather than numerical data. It is initially analysed from an interpretivist perspective in the form of thematic analysis by open coding (Khandkar, no date; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Glaser and Laudel, 2013) and inter-case comparisons. Guest et al say that the main goal of thematic analysis is simply:

> to describe and understand how people feel, think and behave within a particular context relative to a specific research question.

(Guest et al 2012:13)

Guest et al note the similarities between this approach and phenomenology, where, “it is the participants’ perceptions, feelings and lived experiences that are paramount.” (ibid, 13)

In this case, my aim was to describe and understand the thoughts, feelings and actions of teachers who practised critical pedagogy in FE in order to answer questions about why these teachers engaged in critical pedagogy, how they did it and what might sustain further critical practice in the interests of social justice.

Braun and Clarke further describe thematic analysis as the process of:

> identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic.

(Braun and Clarke, 2006:79)

Thematic analysis in my case organises the data set and moves in the direction of grounded theory in that it suggests theories about why and how teachers engage in critical pedagogy and what might be of further help in sustaining their practice. Guest et al describe the relationship between thematic analysis and grounded theory thus:

The emphasis on supporting claims with data is what links applied thematic analysis to grounded theory. Grounded theory is a set of inductive and iterative techniques designed to identify categories and concepts within text that are then linked into formal theoretical models (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss 1967). Charmaz (2006)
describes grounded theory as a set of methods that "consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (p. 2). As Bernard and Ryan (1998) note, the process is deceptively simple: (1) read verbatim transcripts, (2) identify possible themes, (3) compare and contrast themes, identifying structure among them, and (4) build theoretical models, constantly checking them against the data. Applied thematic analysis involves Steps 1 through 3 as well as a portion of Step 4 … a key attribute of the process is that the resulting theoretical models are grounded in the data. In applied research, our output may or may not be a theoretical model (which comprises a distinction with grounded theory), but as with a grounded theory approach, we are greatly concerned with ensuring that our interpretations are supported by actual data in hand. Our approach also shares the systematic yet flexible qualities of grounded theory.

(Guest et al 2012:12)

Green et al contend that qualitative research using thematic analysis should clearly demonstrate four stages of analysis, “immersion in the data, coding, creating categories, and the identification of themes.” (Green et al, 2007: 546) This thesis undertakes all four stages. My results are further analysed, moreover, using Splichal’s analytic grid in order to illustrate the relationship between the experience of participants and the broader forces at play in the education system and under neoliberalism in general. There is thus a double hermeneutic at work in relation to my data:

1. Thematic analysis / grounded theory (inductive);
2. Splichalian analysis of the theories derived from the data (deductive).

Thematic analysis, then, was my main analytic tool in relation to my data, and inductive coding was the procedure used to identify themes. Codes were constantly checked against data in an iterative process. Grounded theory was then used to theorise themes, constantly referring back to the data in order to produce theoretical answers to the questions of why and how teachers practise critical pedagogy, and what would sustain their future practice. Splichal’s grid was then used deductively in relation to the theories produced.

2.4.1a Immersion in the data

Green et al (2007) discuss the importance of becoming immersed in the data as an essential ground for analysis of data. The first stage in immersion is, clearly, the interview process itself. I designed and undertook the interviews and transcribed them myself, which gave me a very close, thought-provoking and enjoyable familiarity with the extraordinarily well-informed and, in many cases, moving accounts given by participants. Green et al comment:
The interviewer witnesses the details that make up the interview context including hesitations, confidence in answering questions, the tone of participants as well as the shared experiences of researcher and participants.

(Green et al, 2007: 547)

When transcribing the interviews, I was careful to include notes in the margin or in brackets in the text to indicate where there were pauses or marked changes in tone. Since I had filmed the interviews, I was also able to make notes about visual cues. The significance of these was not always clear at the time but some of these notes later helped me to pinpoint where the emotional weight of an interview had fallen and therefore in some cases where a participant was making what was, to them, a particularly important point.

Having transcribed each interview, I repeatedly read through each one over the course of several weeks until I arrived at a position where I knew the transcripts extremely well and was able to locate any given phrase or anecdote very quickly. During this period, I was conducting further interviews and the process of transcription, reading, interviewing and beginning to form ideas about codes was iterative and involved a constant cross checking for similarities and differences between existing and new interviews. In relation to this pre-coding process, Green et al say, “one begins to ‘incubate’ ideas about the possibilities of analysis” (Green et al, 2007:547) and this is indeed what began to happen as further interviews produced parallels to earlier transcripts. Once the process of transcription and reading was complete, I was in a strong position to begin coding.

2.4.1b Coding

I used open, descriptive coding to analyse the transcripts in terms of themes. Codes were derived inductively from the data and were content-driven, grounded codes rather than pre-set, a priori codes. The first step in coding was simply to label every section of each transcript in the margin in order that I did not unwittingly privilege particular sections of transcripts which articulated with my own position. I coded manually, a time-consuming but enjoyable process, as the data set was not prohibitively large and I wanted to remain immersed in the data as much as possible.

The codes used described or summarised sections of transcripts that ranged from less than a sentence to, more rarely, whole paragraphs. The table below shows the codes noted at this stage; examples are given in each case to illustrate the relationship between code and transcript. The initial coding of data enabled me to group the codes in relation to four main topics, which became the main subheadings for the presentation of data:
1. Participants’ views of the current educational environment;
2. Participants’ reasons for engaging in critical pedagogy;
3. How participants engaged in critical pedagogy;
4. What would help participants to sustain a critical practice in the future?

As I transcribed new interviews, I checked codes from previous interviews against the new data in a process of constant comparison until cross-case analysis indicated that I had a set of codes that accurately described the data across the interviews. At this stage, I asked a former colleague (a social scientist) to check the codes. He read through the code list and then coded the data himself; agreement with my code book was very close and indicated a high degree of inter-coder reliability. He suggested two changes to my codes: (1) To collapse separate codes for individual academic subjects into one code: ‘academic influences’; and (2) To separate out a code which was initially simply ‘Encouraging students to question’ into separate codes concerned with questioning the curriculum, questioning perspectives, questioning power relations within education and questioning power relations within wider society. I followed this advice but then collapsed these codes again later when identifying categories, as explained on page 58.

### Table 4: codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants’ views of the current educational environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with narrow view of knowledge</td>
<td>Even in my role as an examiner, when I’m examining, they’re saying, ‘I don’t understand why centres are still doing this and writing about this – this isn’t on the syllabus. It doesn’t count as knowledge.’ And it’s knowledge, without a doubt! Just not what they’ve said… Well, that’s not knowledge, is it? That’s passing an exam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with fragmentation / compartmentalism</td>
<td>The knowledge we give the students is so fragmented, so decontextualised, that it becomes meaningless. It’s only useful for passing exams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distorting nature of assessment</td>
<td>You’ve got to have thinking that’s not assessed. Otherwise, it’s just going to be sort of pressurised and distorted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberal values are nihilist</td>
<td>I think at the deepest level, our mentality today is frankly nihilist – well, morally nihilist, anyway. It’s nihilist literally, in the sense of it’s destroying the environment – that’s nihilism – it’s making nothing of the environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberalism is utilitarian</td>
<td>Nothing is of value which can’t be measured but measurement is the only way to measure value, which also fits with the whole thing about targets, benchmarking and so forth – but it is actually a fairly obsessive driving through of utilitarianism in a way in which people do not actually recognise what it is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education under neoliberalism is too instrumentalist</td>
<td>The neoliberal philosophy of education – I think that’s a bit of a misnomer to call it a philosophy, it’s just a pathetic assumption that education is all about getting a productive workforce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberalism fosters inequality</td>
<td>Some people win and some people lose, some people are blessed by the market and some people are cursed by the market. So neoliberalism leads to a great increase in inequality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much control</td>
<td>We’ve got to be able to say stop, I don’t want to control any more, I’m ok how I am. We’ve lost that. I think neoliberalism is just sort of more and more control in the interests of productivity,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems around professionalism</td>
<td>The mark of being a professional is having autonomy. In FE, your autonomy has been taken away again and again, and you’re treated like someone working in a factory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education system doesn’t treat students as individuals</td>
<td>The marketisation of education doesn’t really take into account individualisation of education. We’re getting a one size fits all education system, which to my mind just wouldn’t fit anyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education system inflicts psychological damage on students</td>
<td>One or two of the students I’ve been home-schooling lately, they’re out of school because of stress, and I think that’s caused by this awful system that treats students as objects and packets of funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with students have changed for the worse</td>
<td>Pastoral support becomes more and more about policing and discipline and controlling, rather than about understanding, knowing and liking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some students pressure teachers not to be critical</td>
<td>Lots of students now, though, they’ve been shaped within a neoliberal system that has created a particular set of values. So, if you teach anything that might not be useful for the exam, they don’t want to know. ‘Will this be on the exam?’ they ask. And if the answer is no, then they put their pens down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes over time</td>
<td>Over the past twenty years, FE, instead of being a social service, has become a service for the capitalist economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hate myself for doing this job</td>
<td>One of the reasons why I want to quit the divisional manager job … is that I go home at night thinking, ‘God, you’re an arse. So-and-so is really stressed and you’re making them more stressed, and you have to make them more stressed to achieve A,B,C and D standards’, and that’s because of this neoliberal idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving the profession</td>
<td>If all my teaching were in FE, I would leave now. The further my teaching is away from FE, the more I’m able to teach properly. I’m not sure I can continue in FE, to be honest.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. Participants’ reasons and motivations for engaging in critical pedagogy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desire to make a difference</th>
<th>I don’t think I can change the world, but, you know, the journey of a thousand steps … if I can start my little revolution with my recovery group and my class of mums and see where we go from there.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anger at injustice in society</td>
<td>It’s probably something to do with social justice and the fact that I just hate the thought that people are being exploited because of the position they’re in. I guess that’s it – it’s about exploitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal experience of poverty / injustice</td>
<td>I left home at 20, had a horrific marriage, and found myself on my own. I was very lucky that I had some good friends and we all supported each other. It was a case of, ‘Who’s got a fiver?’, and we’re spending that one this week! And if somebody had bread and somebody else had meat, well then, we all joined together and we had a feast. And it just came from that. It seemed so simple, that if people work together and support each other, things work well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own teacher was an inspiring role model</td>
<td>(My history teacher) encouraged the development of critical ideas, of critical historiography, looking at things from different points of view that encouraged you to think and develop your own ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own experience of education was disempowering</td>
<td>I remember our teachers always saying to us, because we weren’t conforming, ‘You’ll get nowhere in life. You’ll work behind a bacon counter.’ One of my friends really wanted to do a PhD in psychology, and the teacher said to her, ‘Somebody who goes to a secondary modern can’t do a PhD’. And she’s just finished it now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic influences</td>
<td>There are certain subjects that I’ve found very important for me - social anthropology and world history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious influences</td>
<td>You can’t found your life on nothing, which is what nihilism is. I would say a religious approach to life, is perhaps what you can found it on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership of a political group / trade union</td>
<td>One of the advantages which I’ve always found of being in a socialist organisation and actually a trade unionist is that you feel less scared, because you’re a part of a collective. That gives you not only inspiration and ideas, but it means you do not feel alone in doing this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmentalism</td>
<td>I was travelling in the Solomon Islands and it was beautiful for weeks, sailing around the islands. But then I also saw the effects brought about by a logging company – just devastating environmental effects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
And I thought about the relationship between consumerism, capitalism and the environment – and that was it. I just wanted to see if I could do something to help in my teaching.

### 3. How participants engage in critical pedagogy

| Encouraging questioning of the curriculum | When I was teaching functionalism, (one student) used to say, ‘Why are you teaching us this? It’s wrong.’ I said, ‘Well, it’s up to you to understand it so you can prove it’s wrong.’ |
| Encouraging questioning of perspectives | So what I see as our role as a teacher to do is a conduit. Now, if that is narrowing, and we’re saying, see things through this lens and you can’t look beyond it, then you’re a barrier between the student and stuff they could find out. Being a critical teacher is adding something to the process rather than taking something away. You know, have you thought about this, have you questioned it? Do you think that actually is what it says it is? Could there be another reason why this exists? Could there be another reason why people say this? And that’s something you possibly couldn’t get just from reading it all by yourself. And so that’s what I think we’re there for, really. |
| Encouraging questioning of power relations in education | A lot of my students, they got on badly at school and they don’t think education is for them. They don’t feel equal to the teachers and they can’t negotiate the territory. So I use my own experience as a working class mum to show them that education is for everyone and that anyone who tries to keep it away from them should be challenged. |
| Encouraging questioning of power relations of in wider society | I try to get students to reflect on their own position in relation to society. Why are their lives as they are? Who has the power in relation to their lives? Then they can see things are not their fault. The system is stacked against them. |
| Problematizing taken for granted views | The one phrase I try to ban in all my sociology lessons is the phrase, ‘everybody knows’. ‘everybody knows’ is just a nonsensical concept, ‘everybody knows’ is prejudice, ‘everybody knows’ is not a critical way of looking at the world. |
| Giving students real choices | I would rather know upfront and then make an informed choice. So that’s what I try to do with my learners, I try to be upfront with them. |
| Telling students why they are doing what they are doing | They have to do all these additionality courses just because of the funding – we get more funding, the more qualifications they do. So they come in to study catering and we make them do functional skills. They want to know why. I tell them – it’s so the college gets more money for you. I don’t think the other managers would approve if they knew. |
| Exposing the hidden curriculum | Like a kid from Keighley, who says, ‘I can’t do this’; I’ll say to them, ‘Well, that’s all right, cos you’re from Keighley so you’re meant to be like that – don’t worry about it.’ And they’ll just look at me and think, ‘You silly bitch’, but then eventually they’ll ask me, ‘Why did you say that?’ And they’ll come back and they’ll ask more. And I’ll just tell them about the postcode lottery and all this stuff. |
| Sharing your own beliefs and values | I made a decision very early on in my teaching career that I’d just tell students where I was coming from, so that they could be critical of me, take what I say with a pinch of salt from time to time. Now, sometimes it goes a bit too far – all the A2 politics people think I’m a mad communist, but that’s ok. What I think it does mean is that you can have pretty strong debates and discussion and some people will be prepared to give their views if they think that you’re prepared to give your views. They think there’s a bit of give and take. |
| Giving students access to powerful knowledge | A lot of what they’re taught isn’t going to encourage them to question anything. It’s no wonder they turn off school when they’re taught that stuff. They need powerful knowledge, liberating theories. They certainly don’t teach functional skills at Eton, do they? |

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9 This anticipates Young: “You can be absolutely certain that the rich and powerful will always make sure that their children are not left with just their experience – you only have to look at the curriculum of a typical Public School – it never focuses on their pupils’ experience!” (Young, 2014: 14; see also Avis, 1995.)
| **Opening up privileged spaces** | I use my teaching to open doors to try and make things a bit better and give people access to the same chances I’ve had. |
| **Results still matter and are empowering** | Willis pointed out ages ago that working class lads are supposed to fail and be channelled into working class jobs. We need to make sure these kids know that doing well academically increases their life chances. Get good A levels, go to a decent university. That’s life-changing stuff. |
| **Developing the personality** | Critical pedagogy is actually how can we serve the people who come. Then you use that in general terms, you develop the personality. At one stage I put up on my wall the introduction from the Soviet Education Act of 1918 – the preamble – which states that education is about the development of the personality. One short paragraph is fitting as a motto. It’s a noble statement about the development of the personality – and I think that any educator, that is actually where you start from. You look at the personality in terms of the current situation. How do you develop it? |

### 4. What would help participants to sustain a critical practice in the future?

| **Contact with like-minded educators** | I do feel quite isolated, actually, quite lonely, so access to other people who are using that method, that approach, would be great. |
| **Support from universities** | Teacher educators could help hugely with this. At the moment, young teacher trainees don’t even know that education needn’t just be about targets and outcomes. That needs to change. |
| **Sympathetic senior management** | Senior managers where I work aren’t sympathetic – they just talk about targets and Ofsted and bums on seats. They seem to have forgotten we’re educators. If we had senior management that remembered we’re there to educate, that would help. |
| **More time to develop resources and methods** | One of the main issues is the pressure to fit in what’s needed for exams – it doesn’t leave much time to explore. Also, the uncertainty around jobs and the deskilling of teachers means we’re all running scared and we take on more and more classes to make ourselves indispensable, so we have no time to do anything properly. We need time to reflect and develop what we give the kids in class. |
| **Links with like-minded people outside education** | It can’t just be in education – we need to join with others – unions, protest groups, political parties. It’s not just education that needs changing – the whole bloody thing does. |
| **Change in government** | Frankly, under a neoliberal government, we’re always going to be on the back foot. We need wholesale political change. |
| **Renewal of local democracy** | If I just toss into the ring the idea of possibly elected local boards of education... the advantage of having a single body is that people have to stand for election and be held accountable as to education policy – not just be odds and sods who are set up from the local council – it would also mean that people would have to debate education policy directly and it would be a way in which socialists could think about what our education policy actually is, and put that into it. |

### 2.4.1c Categories

Having produced a code book which covered all the data from the transcripts, I proceeded to the next stage of analysis recommended by Green *et al*:

The data [then] need to be revisited to examine the ways the codes can be linked ... This linking of codes aims to create coherent categories and is the third step in analysis of interview data. It is concerned with looking for a ‘good fit’ between codes that share a relationship.

*(Green et al, 2007: 548).*
The next stage, then, akin to axial coding, produced hierarchies of topics, where codes were subtopics and categories were parent topics. The categories produced from the codes are shown in the table below. These categories are presented and analysed in detail in chapter 4 on the presentation and analysis of data.

**Table 5: categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Participants’ views of the current educational environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate conception of knowledge</td>
<td>Problems with narrow view of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problems with fragmentation / compartmentalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distorting nature of assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with neoliberal values</td>
<td>Neoliberal values are nihilist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neoliberalism is utilitarian / too much emphasis on outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education under neoliberalism is too instrumental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neoliberalism fosters inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveillance and control</td>
<td>Too much control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problems around professionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberal education harms students</td>
<td>Education system doesn’t treat students as individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education system inflicts psychological damage on students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationships with students have changed for the worse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some students pressure teachers not to be critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative impact on participant</td>
<td>Changes over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I hate myself for doing this job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leaving the profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Participants’ reasons and motivations for engaging in critical pedagogy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social justice motivation</td>
<td>Desire to make a difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anger at injustice in society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own experiences of teachers</td>
<td>Own teacher was an inspiring role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Own experience of education was disempowering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic influences</td>
<td>Academic influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitments outside education</td>
<td>Religious influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Membership of a political group / trade union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environmentalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. How participants engage in critical pedagogy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging a questioning approach</td>
<td>Encouraging questioning of the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouraging questioning of interpretations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouraging questioning of power relations in education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouraging questioning of power relations of in wider society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problematizing taken for granted views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being honest with students</td>
<td>Giving students real choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Telling students why they are doing what they are doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exposing the hidden curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing your own beliefs and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering students</td>
<td>Giving students access to powerful knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opening up privileged spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Results still matter and are empowering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing the personality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. What would help participants to sustain a critical practice in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support from within the education system</th>
<th>Support from outside the education system</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact with like-minded educators</td>
<td>Links with like-minded people outside education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from universities</td>
<td>Change in government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathetic senior management</td>
<td>Renewal of local democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time to develop resources and methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4.1d Themes

Having sorted coded data into descriptive categories, I then moved on to the final analytic stage recommended by Green et al, who say:

> The fourth and final step of analysis of interview data is identification of themes. A theme is more than a category. The generation of themes requires moving beyond a description of a range of categories; it involves shifting to an explanation or, even better, an interpretation of the issue under investigation.

(Green et al, 2007: 549)

The collation of categories into a narrative ‘theory’ is akin to grounded theory and the theoretical insights derived at this stage are presented in more detail in chapter three on the presentation and analysis of data. For example, one aspect of grounded theory derived from this thesis is that teachers are motivated to engage in critical pedagogy by a desire to work for social justice informed by their own prior experiences of education and academic insights and helped by their commitments outside education, such as political and religious affiliations. This is a theory or hypothesis supported by the data (and one which could then be tested by further research which would aim for the qualities of reliability and generalizability). This is where a grounded theory approach would stop. The key stages of grounded theory – theoretical sampling, open coding, constant comparisons, diagrams, axial coding, theoretical saturation and theory generation (Heist, 2012: 25) are complete. At this stage:

> The “theory” is articulated through a storyline that employs “descriptive narrative about the central phenomenon of the study.”

(Heist, 2012: 56, citing Strauss and Corbin, 1990)

The present thesis, however, proceeds to Green et al’s fourth stage by further analysing and theorising the inductively derived theory by application of a Splichalian perspective which aims to explain and interpret the results. Green et al write:

> The identification of themes, rather than categories, is ... the litmus test of a study that produces stronger evidence ... a high-quality paper identifies themes by linking the categories with social theory, until
eventually an overriding explanation is arrived at which makes sense of the various patterns which have emerged at the descriptive level.

(Green et al, 2007: 549)

In this thesis, the social theory used is Splichal’s analysis, and the application of this is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

Data produced during the third stage of collection was not included in the codes and categories, since participants had been given a copy of chapter three, where these were presented, and it would have made no sense to incorporate their comments there. Instead, separate coding of this data resulted in the following four main categories:

1. Further comments on critical pedagogy;
2. Further comments on neoliberalism;
3. Comments on the thesis;

These are discussed further in chapter three.

2.5 A note on the operationalisation of the concepts of ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘critical pedagogy’

As noted on page, I recognise that terms such as ‘critical education’, ‘social justice’, ‘critical reflection’ and so forth have to some extent been recuperated by hegemonic neoliberalism and that therefore it is difficult to know for certain whether teachers who describe their own pedagogy as ‘critical’ are using the term in a ‘critical’ or co-opted sense. Similarly, although the term ‘neoliberalism’ is now commonplace in academic research, it was rather less so at the time I conducted the interviews and was not necessarily part of common parlance (unless one was, as several participants were, involved in left-wing politics). Two questions on the interview schedule therefore asked interviewees to explain their understanding of critical pedagogy (question 2) and neoliberalism (question 3) precisely in order to check that the concepts were being operationalised in a similar (non-recuperated) way.

2.5.1 Neoliberalism

This term was readily understood by seven out of ten respondents; the remaining three had not heard the term before they engaged with this research project but two, on reflection, linked it to marketisation, neo-conservatism, instrumentalism and ‘tick-box’ approaches to education. The third participant was the one referred to earlier, whose interview in the end was excluded on the grounds that her understanding of the key concepts was not in line with the aims of the thesis. In this case, she did not know the
term ‘neoliberalism,’ nor, when I explained the meaning of the term, did she recognise cognate concepts such as ‘New Right’, ‘neoconservatism’, ‘marketisation’ and ‘instrumentalism.’ She explained:

Actually, I think it’s good that we help people to get on and adjust to the system, otherwise how will they succeed?

This was an interesting point and it is certainly true that our students need to be able to thrive and prosper through earning a living, but it was apparent that this participant understood terms such as ‘social justice’ in a recuperated way and so her interview could not form part of the purposive sample.

The other participants had responses that demonstrated that they operationalised concepts in similar ways which supported the construct validity of the thesis:

It’s very much a market-driven approach, seeing the ‘service user’ as a customer, a consumer. Looking at things very much in a productivity, competitiveness approach. In the specific context of further education, it’s a transferring of skills that are considered necessary for the economy and that there’s a market for. That kind of approach – adding to one’s value on the job market. The neoliberal part of it is the market, the reductionist approach, rather than a neo-conservative thing which I think is there as well in the mix – quite a conservative approach to what people should be thinking.

Some participants had extensive knowledge of historical circumstances of the rise of neoliberalism. For example, one said:

Neoliberalism is based upon what has been known over the last thirty years or so as the Washington consensus – the idea that if we can shrink the role of the state, if we can privatise as much of the economy and of social life as we possibly can, then things will be better for everyone.

Several participants had been in teaching since the 1970s and had lived through the rise of neoliberalism and these were able to recall the era of the Great Debate, triggered by Callaghan’s speech at Ruskin College in 1976 (Callaghan, 1976) and link this with the advent of neoliberalism in the English education system. For example, one said:

Neoliberalism in education started with the triumph of neoliberalism in pretty much everything else in the 1970s and 1980s, when Callaghan declared that comprehensives had failed, progressive education had failed, he started the Great Debate in education – and then when the Conservatives came in, they decided that education had a role in society – a role, not a multiplicity of roles. It had to provide for the economy. The idea that education was to provide people with critical tools for grappling with society was complete anathema to the neoliberal governments that came in around the world from the early 1980s onwards.

One teacher in particular gave a sophisticated and informed description of what he thought of as a fundamentalist fervour underlying neoliberalism:
A better phrase for neoliberalism is market fundamentalism, because it’s not based on evidence – it’s a religious perspective, I believe. You can tell this when people talk about the markets ‘doing’ things. Markets are social constructions. Markets consist of iterated series of individuals and groups performing various activities which have emergent outcomes, but markets do not think, market do not make decisions, markets do not decide things. Markets aren’t a subject, they’re not a person ... so, if they think the market is right all the time and they won’t be deflected from this idea, neoliberals are market fundamentalists.

From the responses given, I was satisfied that respondents had sufficiently similar interpretations and understandings of this concept to make the research valid in this respect.

2.5.2 Critical pedagogy

Respondents, who after all were all trained teachers, mostly gave ready interpretations of this concept. Indeed, in one case, an interviewee had made critical pedagogy the subject of an essay on his PGCE ten years previously. A range of definitions was given, such as the simple, “teaching that constantly questions the prevalent assumptions of a society.” Another participant linked this questioning process with Marxism, saying:

One of my heroes is Karl Marx, and one of his mottoes was, ‘doubt everything’. So you should give students the tools to doubt everything and, obviously, some of the things will survive their doubting and they’ll be able to come through with some kind of worldview.

Most participants linked definitions of critical pedagogy with an interest in social justice and with the transformation of society:

It’s a way of exposing power relationships and getting students to see the sources of their own oppression – and helping them to do something to address that.

Again, the one exception was the teacher whose interview was not in the end used; her understanding of critical pedagogy was rather tentative and instrumentalist:

I’m not sure – on the PGCE I never really knew what they were on about when they said about critical thinking and I’m not really sure what critical pedagogy is, to be honest. I think it’s something to do with questioning things, getting students to think for themselves so they can develop transferable skills.

Further descriptions of what participants meant by the theory and practice of critical pedagogy are given in section iii of the presentation and analysis of data in chapter three. Again, it was clear that all the participants selected had a strong awareness of the theory and practice of critical pedagogy and that their interpretations of the concept were in line with the aims of this thesis to explore critical pedagogy as practised in response to the strictures of neoliberalism.
2.6 Chapter conclusion

Chapter two outlined the perspective (interpretivist), approach (critical), method of data collection (three stages, the main one being semi-structured interviews) and method of data analysis (thematic analysis) used in the thesis. Thematic analysis sacrifices some of the narrative integrity that would have surfaced using case study analysis, but the importance of maintaining confidentiality ruled the latter out. Two questions explored concept validity in relation to neoliberalism and critical pedagogy; data produced indicated a strong degree of commonality in participants’ understanding of these terms. Their interpretations are analysed and discussed further in the following chapter.
3.1 Outline of the chapter

This chapter presents, analyses and interprets data in three ways:

1) A presentation of data in relation to the categories (discussed in chapter three) derived from coding;
2) A narrative ‘grounded theory’ based on the categories;
3) A Splichalian interpretation of the grounded theory.

3.2 Categories

The thesis sought qualitative data in response to four main areas of enquiry:

i) Participants’ views of the current educational environment;
ii) Participants’ reasons and motivations for engaging in critical pedagogy;
iii) How participants engage in critical pedagogy;
iv) What would help participants to sustain critical pedagogy in the future?

Data was assigned through coding, as outlined in chapter three, to a number of categories in each area.

3.2.1 Participants’ views of the current educational environment

3.2.1a Inadequate conception of knowledge

Respondents expressed unease about the impact of neoliberalism on education in various ways. Several pointed out that neoliberalism had resulted in an intensification of what they saw as a ‘tick box’ culture where knowledge is fragmented and atomised into meaningless lists. So reductive is this approach that some teachers felt that what they were teaching was nothing more than a convenient homeopathic package of information that had been distilled to such an extent that any original significance had been lost (and, perhaps, the homeopathic remedy prevented the student accessing any real remedy for ignorance). One teacher described how the constraints of the syllabus led him to teach with a lack of integrity, where what he taught sometimes ended up being a misrepresentation, useful only in terms of mirroring the knowledge he knew was wanted by examiners:

We’re pushed into teaching a syllabus, a set amount of knowledge, and a set of skills that use that knowledge, just to get a result. I find myself saying – for our purposes, this is what this means but it’s not really true.
For example, someone might say something quite interesting about whether Marxists might want to use unstructured interviews when I’m teaching methods!

Other participants also mentioned their worries that examiners would only accept and credit certain kinds of knowledge and that this therefore militated against real exploration of topics. Many of the teachers had themselves acted as A level examiners and two said that, in their experience of examiners’ meetings, the pressure to standardise marking eroded any sense of autonomy or any acceptance of alternative approaches to answering questions. The need for standardised answers which could be reliably marked against a mark scheme was the prime factor in determining the marks awarded to students; in turn, of course, the pressure to standardise knowledge was passed on to teachers. Why teach anything other than that which would be credited? Teachers are subject to stringent performance management procedures based on their students’ exam results and so there is little incentive (and many penalties) for exploring ideas widely or being innovative in one’s approach. Knowledge is thus presented as fixed and unchallengeable. This approach undermines any sense of connection with work, which begins to feel mass-produced; the resulting alienation encourages teachers to see their job as something to be done as quickly as possible so that they can go home.

Another teacher described how there was little room for exploration of ideas and for the development of thought away from scrutiny. He felt that the constant need to have an eye on assessment reduced the freedom of students to think in meaningful ways:

You’ve got to have thinking that’s not assessed. Otherwise, it’s just going to be sort of pressurised and distorted.

This same teacher went on to describe how, in his view, an instrumentalist view of knowledge was disempowering because it prevented students from seeing “the big picture”, a view backed up by Magrini, who puts the case for a more holistic approach to education (Magrini, 2014). Students may be equipped with the kind of knowledge that allows them to function in the economy, but they are certainly not given the kind of knowledge that would permit them to question the way the economy is arranged. The teacher thought there should be a renewed discussion on the left about the role and function of education in relation to wider society. He felt that this debate had been hijacked by a parochial, semi-functionalist view of the purposes of education which fed uncritically into a New Right instrumentalist perspective:

So, what we have is a group on the left who think education should be about skills and competences. They think that’s the way to empower the working class. And of course it’s important that working class kids get jobs. But actually, why should their education restrict their opportunities?
Here, the participant echoes concerns raised by Avis (1991), who pointed out that a competence-based approach supports a rightist individualism that encourages students to invest in their own marketability but does not foster any sense of social action or collectivity:

> There is no sense of collective empowerment, and even when the individual is placed in a group context it is to encourage the acceptance of group evaluation of their performance.

(Avis, 1991:127)

Avis similarly points out that some radical teachers are attracted to this approach to education but, he says, the practice of a competence-based approach to teaching neuters any radicalism and ultimately has a conservative effect, in what he describes as “the strange fate of progressive education.” (Avis, 1991: 138)

Atkins has further commented upon the class-based nature of the competency approach:

> There has been a dilution of strong occupational knowledge and skills and the programmes which offered this have been replaced with ‘broad vocational’ programmes which emphasise the development of literacy, numeracy, personal and social skills ... These vocationally orientated programmes, rather than leading to high pay, high skill work, prepare young people for the low pay, low skill economy in a form of class and labour (re) production ... driven by economic, rather than educational, imperatives.

(Atkins, 2011: 7)

### 3.2.1b Problems with neoliberal values

Several respondents elaborated at length on the reductionist, nihilist, restricting qualities of neoliberalism. They had experience of living under less stultifying discourses and felt that a key characteristic of neoliberalism was its moral vacuity:

> It’s an ideology that justifies inequality and over-rationalisation, for the sake of unnecessary and potentially disastrous productivity. I think the deepest level of our mentality today is frankly morally nihilist. Values aren’t recognised. In effect, they disappear from people’s thinking and people’s discourse.

This naming of the essence of neoliberalism as nihilism appeared strikingly in another interview:

> The current hyper-consumerist capitalist environment makes wars inevitable. Wars tend to be about resources. And we’re running out of resources. And that means unless we change our mode of thinking and being, we have to fight wars. This is a form of nihilism. War is nihilistic, if anything is.
This theme of the nihilism at the centre of neoliberalism resonates with the writings of Tuck (2013), who characterises neoliberalism as cynicism, nihilism and despair; in her view, neoliberalism empties all value out of human life and presents us with a bleak and meaningless view of the world where things are only valued as commodities and property. Nihilism is used as a literal description of the philosophy of neoliberalism. It is a philosophy which renders unlikely any depth, any sense of connection, any integrity, and whose stance is a quick and mocking cynicism.

Another participant agreed that the values of neoliberalism are reductionist and that only commodities have value from a neoliberal perspective:

> It’s the use and magnification of the free market as being the ultimate driver of all social and economic processes, the idea that everything has to be viewed in terms of market relationships, therefore, and that market relationships are the mechanism for achieving any desired outcome in society or in economic or in social or educational terms. Therefore, the market drives everything, the market will be able to achieve everything. And not only that – not only is the market the thing through which anything desirable can be achieved, but nothing that is not marketised is desirable.

Again, the striking thing in this response was the felt constriction in human experience: all had been reduced to the market and nothing outside the market had any meaning or value. Neoliberalism thus encourages individuals to construct their own identity in terms of their market worth; students are in effect enjoined to commodify themselves by ‘investing’ in their own skills in order to increase their market value. Human relationships are pictured in terms of exchange value. Another participant said, “Neoliberalism depends on the privatisation not just of the economy but also of social life.’ This is a very common theme in the literature on neoliberalism – for example, Brown writes:

> Neoliberalism casts the political and social spheres both as appropriately dominated by market concerns and as themselves organised by market rationality ... the state itself must construct and construe itself in market terms, as well as develop policies and promulgate a political culture that figures citizens exhaustively as rational economic actors in every sphere of life.

(Brown, 2006:33)

Still on the theme of the neoliberal depletion of value, another respondent commented:

> Values are written off as ‘simply feelings’, and your feeling might differ from mine, so effectively the value has disappeared and we’re not allowed to talk about it.

Here, there is a clear recognition that neoliberalism does not just affect the public arena but that it has an impact on the very nature and possibility of ethical thought itself. Splichal’s analytic grid sheds some light on this process: neoliberalism makes market
values visible and spectacular (top right) whilst simultaneously downgrading ethical values as simply ‘feelings’ (bottom right); the effect of this on the individual is to market themselves and to picture their own worth in market terms (top left), meanwhile losing the ability to conceive of value in anything other than market terms (bottom left). There is certainly some resonance here with a postmodern, anything goes, lifestyle-oriented, ironic Zeitgeist, which takes nothing (including human values) seriously and which has therefore a deep and destructive predisposition to cynicism.

One participant developed this theme further and explained how, in his view, neoliberalism straightforwardly results in alienation. Neoliberalism denies the existence of collective social life because the market needs individual consumers and the neoliberal state needs to blame individuals for social ills in order to sustain the inequalities inherent in the system:

Neoliberalism leads to individualization. Not individualism, which is not the opposite of collectivism. Individualism is a good thing – we all want to be our own person. Individualisation is the opposite of collectivism. and what in the Marxist tradition is called alienation. You’re alienated from your fellow creature, you’re alienated from society, your leisure time, your social interactions are all privatised.

This echoes Apple’s contention that neoliberalism constitutes individuals in relation to the market and deracinates them from any history, society or sense of community (Apple, 2013: 8). In this way, individualisation makes everyone responsible for their own trajectory within society, leading to anomie (Durkheim, 2014). The inevitable sense of resultant dissatisfaction leads to a profound existential unease which cannot be assuaged by any amount of consumer goods.

Several respondents highlighted the fact that neoliberalism has unequal outcomes and seeks to justify inequality. One said, “we’re told that it’s good for us, good for everybody ... the fact is that it’s obviously only good for the people who can take advantage of it”, whilst another commented:

It makes inequality worse because it’s a system that only benefits the rich, the 1%. It’s all this Occupy stuff. The rich becoming richer whilst the poor get poorer and the government tells us we’re all in it together.

Clearly, neither of these respondents had been at all convinced by the rhetoric of ‘all in it together’ and they construed this rhetoric as an ideological smokescreen obscuring the true nature of the relationship between rich and poor. They were aware of growing opposition to the rhetoric and practice of neoliberalism and had, in several cases, themselves taken part in demonstrations against the Coalition government’s programme of cuts. They knew the symbolic significance of chanting, “We are the 99%” and some
had read Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) and were acutely aware of the destructive effects of increasing inequality under neoliberalism:

    Richard Wilkinson has proved beyond reasonable doubt that unequal societies are less happy, unequal societies are unhealthier and the lack of good health is concentrated towards the bottom. Now, in terms of education, unequal societies are less well-educated, and the lack of education is concentrated towards the bottom again.

The attempts of the neoliberal rich to use communitarian rhetoric had not been at all persuasive for these participants and were seen as blatantly cynical expediencies designed to further the extortion of wealth from ordinary people. One participant discussed how, though David Cameron talks (perhaps unconvincingly) about One Nation Toryism, George Osborne is one of the principal architects and drivers of neoliberal economic policies in the UK; this participant thought that only the partnership with the Liberal Democrats in Coalition was providing any restraints at all on what would otherwise be an accelerated and intensified version of neoliberalism in the UK.

Most of the participants talked specifically about the impact of neoliberal values upon the education system. The rise of neoliberalism in education was considered to have coincided with an increase in instrumentalism, a utilitarian focus upon outcomes and a sense that the financial bottom-line mattered much more than any concern for education as a public good. One participant said:

    I think the education system currently is very focussed on outcomes. Certainly within languages, we are very much focussed on success rates. It is very much financially-driven, funding-driven, therefore success rate driven. So basically within my lessons I am just teaching to that syllabus. There’s no room for manoeuvre. There’s none of the cultural things you’d like to talk about, or the history with regards to a language. Basically, your lesson is just focussed on exam technique, mark schemes, how to get an A, how to get a B, how to pass, basically. If it’s not on the exam syllabus, we don’t need to do that, so we can move on.

In a system where full funding is only given when a student passes the exam for which they have enrolled, the pressure on teachers to focus simply on exams is intense. Moreover, the competitive climate and the constant comparison with benchmarks and national averages in a never-ending attempt to demonstrate value for public money meant that teachers felt that students had to be driven through the course to the exams at all costs. Where success rates are measured as a product of retention and achievement, there is considerable pressure upon teachers to ensure that, six weeks into a course, all students on the course proceed to the exam. However, before the notorious six week deadline after which enrolments become firm, teachers come under pressure from managers to move any students who are not likely to pass off the course before they count against the institution’s statistics. There is no room to wait and see whether
the student might, over time, develop, and there is certainly no room for a student who
is interested in the subject but might not pass. Teachers felt that they were judged by
managers on their success rates alone and that therefore, even though as individuals
they might want to keep students on the course, they really felt that they had little
choice. One participant said:

We struggle in FE because once we have students enrolled and once we
get past a certain timeframe, these students have to pass, because that’s
how you become judged as a teacher – after so many weeks in, these
students have to pass. So you give somebody so many weeks and if by
so many weeks they’re not looking as though they’re going to meet the
standard, you need to get rid. It’s so sad because for some people it’s
just about having more time. But we’re time-limited again, more and
more so. It feels so much at the moment that it’s all about money and
not really about education.

Moreover, when funding is tied to the number of qualifications gained by a student, as it
was until recently in FE (see below, page 94), there is considerable emphasis upon the
need to drive students through as many qualifications as possible in order that they
attract ‘additionality’ funding. One teacher told me about how the departments in her
college were performance rated on the amount of income they brought in and that a
significant income stream was generated through additionality; all teachers were under
pressure to provide extra level 2 courses for their A level students in Equality and
Diversity, for example. These courses were widely perceived by students as a complete
waste of time and teachers said that it simply encouraged students not to take college
seriously. The focus on additionality was much criticised by participants on the grounds
that students were simply being used to attract further funding and that there was a lack
of honesty with students about why they were being required to enrol on courses which
didn’t seem relevant to them. One teacher said:

It’s awful to be treated like an object. You’re just a little wheel in a bigger
system. Everybody will have this NVQ. Wonderful. And everyone will have
a level two numeracy and literacy because we get more funding. And who
likes to be forced to do something? I don’t. And I definitely don’t work
very hard when I feel that I’ve been forced or conned or whatever. It
doesn’t feel right.

The education system under neoliberalism was seen as not just nihilist and cynical but as
thoroughly utilitarian; people are not treated as ends in themselves in this system but as
a means to an end (more funding for individual colleges, for instance), and education is
not seen as an end in itself but only as worth having as a precursor to entering the
workforce. One teacher talked at length about what he saw as the utilitarian philosophy
underpinning the neoliberal outlook. His view was that neoliberalism is simply
straightforward utilitarianism masquerading as unchallengeable common sense; he felt
that it was vital to unmask the ideology to expose its roots in a very explicit
philosophical concept and structure which has, since the 1850s, been subject to rigorous criticism. There is, he said, nothing remotely neutral about neoliberalism; rather, it is a very distinct, clear and identifiable philosophical / administrative position:

You need to call something what it is – to say, this is utilitarianism, and this is why it’s a load of rubbish. We need to be absolutely upfront here and not let people assume that it is a natural state of things.

The neoliberal project is quintessentially utilitarian in a particularly materialistic way, insofar as institutions and activities are deemed ‘good’ to the extent to which they promote an increase in material standards of living. Other possible outcomes are not recognised – so, for instance, the development of the personality, or education as a good in itself – have no value within this system. Rodrigues has argued, for example, that the central approach in Mises’ version of neoliberalism is a utilitarianism that measures everything according to the degree to which it improves the material conditions of existence; in Mises’ view, the free market mechanism is the best way that this can be done (Rodrigues, 2013:1006). A focus on outcomes is not necessarily a bad thing if the outcomes are worthwhile; the problem with neoliberalism is that it devalues everything other than the material. One participant explained that this utilitarianism was unhelpful in terms of education because education is a good in itself and should not be treated as a means to an end, and certainly not as an adjunct to the economy:

Education is to make you a more rounded human being, not to make you a cog in the machinery of the market. It’s completely nonsensical to treat education as just serving the economy. Obviously, it wouldn’t be a great thing if we just taught everyone to be poets. We’d all starve to death pretty quickly. But the idea that nobody should be poets and nobody should be encouraged to be poets – or if they’re going to be a poet, they should be a poet in their spare time after they’ve spent twelve hours rewiring houses – is just wrong.

Participants objected to the utilitarian emphasis of neoliberalism not just because of its nihilism and moral vacuity; they also took issue with the intensely classed nature of education under neoliberalism. They felt that it was largely working class children whose education was framed in the service of larger economic interests (interests which benefitted the capitalist class rather than the working class). According to participants, working class children are funneled into the service of an economic system which does not have their best interests at heart. In this sense, the utilitarianism at the heart of neoliberalism deviates from democratic versions of utilitarianism which have at their heart an essentially equalizing mission to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number; the contemporary version of utilitarianism is centred instead around what will promote the greatest material wealth of the rich. One participant commented, ruefully:
The people who've been running education for the last twenty-odd years might well be using as a textbook for what to do ‘Schooling in Capitalist America’ by the Marxists Bowles and Gintis\(^\text{10}\), which describes how schools turn people into good little workers. According to functionalists, schools turn people into good little citizens; according to Marxists, schools turn people into good little workers. You kind of have the impression that Keith Joseph was reading this when it came out, thinking – that's a bloody good idea! Marx found Hegel standing on his head and turned him the right way round; Keith Joseph found Marxists the right way up and turned them on their head.

The teachers interviewed felt that the mantra of parental choice so central to the New Right educational agenda had resonance only for the middle classes and that turning the education system into a quasi-market further entrenched and reproduced the disadvantages of the working class. Several referred to sociological studies of parental choice such as those by Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1996) and Bourdieu (1986), which showed that middle class capital (social, cultural and material) gives them an advantage in the education market. Middle class parents are better able to choose because they can afford to live in areas where there are good schools, they can afford to travel to access good schools, their social network includes teachers and governors and other education workers, they know how to decode league tables and they feel familiar with and entitled to the educational territory. One teacher said:

> Working class parents, it’s not that they don’t care about their kids’ education – it’s that they don’t know how to play the system, they haven’t got the contacts in terms of social capital, they haven’t got the knowledge that’s valued in education in terms of cultural capital. Therefore they lose out. Not because their kids are less bright or less able, not because they care less about their education, but because they’re disadvantaged by the very system itself.

In sum, participants’ opinions of education under neoliberalism were extremely negative. When I asked one interviewee whether she thought education under neoliberalism could be critical, she said, “It’s not education of any kind, let alone critical education.”

### 3.2.1c Surveillance and control:

Participants spoke disparagingly about the over-use of instrumental reason as a means to control all aspects of life under neoliberalism. Teachers acknowledged that a degree of control was necessary but felt that there should be limits – some aspects of life simply should not be controlled:

> Over-rationalisation is the use of instrumental reason to control life in as many aspects as possible. It makes me think of Freud, the ‘death instinct’, thanatos, where you want to get everything under control. You know, life isn't controllable. All the best aspects of life are uncontrollable.

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\(^\text{10}\) Bowles & Gintis, 1976
They’re sort of spontaneous – that’s what’s so wonderful about them – they’re miracles, if you like, but we don’t, we want to control miracles. It’s a thoroughly deadening approach to reason.

The concerns here about the neoliberal project to extend control into more and more areas of life, into areas where freedom and spontaneity should be allowed to flourish, reflect concerns widely expressed by critics of neoliberalism in education:

The extension of neo-liberal governance over more domains of social existence and the attendant surveillance and control over everyday practices and intimacies has the effect of increasing societal control (totalizing) by singling out more and more aspects of private life for inspection and rational administration.

(Nadesan, 2006, no page)

The respondent who expressed these concerns began teaching in the 1970s and watched aghast as the postwar settlement was dismantled. He clearly identified a range of the key features and consequences of neoliberalism. In particular, he noted its obsessions with order, quantification and, most of all, control – all values which the respondent felt are profoundly antithetical to life itself, which cannot be controlled and which, moreover, we should not seek to control. To attempt to pin life down is to destroy ‘miracles.’

Splichal’s analytic framework helps to cast light on this teacher’s sense of unease here. The teacher clearly felt that the state was intruding where it had no business to be – in the private realm, which was surveilled and controlled and thereby deadened. The ‘trammelled’ individual who is constituted under these conditions certainly does not experience life as miraculous or spontaneous. Rather, everything is tallied and charted and inspected.

It is noteworthy that this participant and others recognise the need for some control (one said, “there have to be some constraints – I’m no anarchist”) – indeed, many of them recognised that state bureaucracy, for instance, is necessary in terms of checks on the spending of public money and in terms of checking that equality and diversity are being well considered. However, they felt that the quality, purpose and extent of surveillance and control had changed. One spoke about the culture of inspection, checking, auditing and systems:

It’s all about the system and not about the reality. That’s a classic conflict, because people want to check that the right thing’s being done, but in the end the systems for checking become more important than other things.

There was a clear feeling that systems had begun to matter more than people and more than education. Another teacher said:
It’s very regimented. People have to be seen within every so many weeks, and if the learner’s on holiday or the learner’s off ill, you’re then kind of pressurising your learner, saying, “I know you’re ill, but can I just call in at the hospital and get you to sign this paper?” It’s all about having the paperwork signed. One of my bosses was saying, “Well, even if you just spend ten minutes and get the paperwork signed, it doesn’t matter what you do.”

The focus on the controlling nature of neoliberalism is, as noted, central in the work of academics who point to the difference in attitudes to freedom between classical liberalism and neoliberalism: whereas classical liberalism sought to maximise freedom and keep the economy separate from the state, neoliberalism seeks to use state institutions to control workers through systems of surveillance and governmentality in order to reshape them in the interests of capital. Davies’ and Bansel’s (2007) discussion of the rise of governmentality is particularly poignant and helps to explain why many who began teaching in the 1970s have felt the impact of neoliberalism in especially profound ways. It is worth quoting Davies and Bansel at length as they make it clear that the neoliberal strategy of surveillance and control was intentionally deployed under the disingenuous rationale of the alleged failure of Keynesian economics:

Neoliberalism as a form of governmentality first emerged in the 1970s in response to some of the more radical and progressive positions being taken in education and the media at that time. ... democracies were beginning to be seen by some of those in the world of high finance as ungovernable. Research was commissioned to diagnose the problem and seek solutions. The *Report on Governability* by Crozier et al. (1975) argued that democratic citizens must be made both more governable and more able to service capital. In that report ‘value-oriented academics’, along with journalists who favour ‘the cause of humanity’, were singled out as in need of control (Sklar, 1980, p 39). It was in schools and in the public services that the new forms of governmentality were first installed (Davies, 1996). Those who had vested financial interests in the economic and social reforms of neoliberal governance recognised the need to make subjects more governable in the face of the social upheavals that had radicalized previously docile populations (Sklar, 1980). This is not, of course, how it was presented to those who were to be brought under control. Rather, the apparent failure of Keynesian economics was presented as the justification for widespread and radical changes.

(Davies and Bansel, 2007:46)

Several participants spoke poignantly of the changes they had lived through and some highlighted the Education Reform Act (1988) as the point at which neoliberalism and marketisation had entered the British education system; after this, they said, schools had become like factories:

So, we had quality control. Now, before the ERA, the last place I heard about quality control was in the glue factory I used to work in. I used to work in quality control for a while. So, they were treating students like
glue pots. We had to control the quality of the glue that was being poured into the pots. The glue is education and students are glue pots.

Others thought that the changes hadn’t made themselves felt strongly in FE until after the colleges were incorporated in 1993. One participant thought that things had got much worse since colleges became free of Local Authority control and said those who came into the sector in the eighties and early nineties had assumed they were entering one kind of job; the nature of the job changed radically post-incorporation, when:

very systematic marketisation started after 1993, once FE colleges were removed from LEA control and they became sort of self-standing corporations.

Along with the incorporation of colleges and the Education Reform Act, participants pointed to the change in inspection regimes signalled by the change from HMI to Ofsted as a further turning point on the road to increased surveillance (see also Ward, 2012, Wilkins 2014):

Nobody had a problem with HMI. The new thing that came through after the ERA was Ofsted, which aggressively made sure teachers and schools were doing what they were supposed to do, whereas HMI had more of a supportive role, to help people get better rather than condemning them for not being good enough.

Teachers were also critical about the management teams in their colleges; one participant spoke with some bitterness about the management at his previous college, which he felt had become increasingly dominated by a surveillance culture which restricted teachers’ autonomy and made his day to day existence at work feel increasingly constrained:

They wanted you in specific places at specific times, they want you to teach exactly what they want you to teach, they want you to teach it in ways that they want you to teach it.

This teacher spoke of a culture where managers needed to know the whereabouts of teaching staff at all times – on one occasion, for example, he had gone to take a book out of the library during a free period and, because he was not in the staff office next door to the library, his line manager had phoned his wife to find out where he was. As he said, this degree of surveillance had not even happened when he worked in the glue factory.

3.2.1d The environment harms students

Several respondents laughed (without much humour) as they described the rhetorical double-speak used in neoliberal education; one, for example, pointed out that, although there is much publicity in education about inclusion and the need to cater for
‘individuals’, in fact the system strongly militates against real concern or provision for the needs of individuals:

It’s the absolute opposite of inclusion, isn’t it? It’s just locking people out again. We’re getting a one size fits all education system, which to my mind just wouldn’t fit anyone.

This last point was to prove a recurring theme in the research: many interviewees pointed out that, in their view, the current marketised education system was dehumanising, anti-personal and anti-individualist. Another teacher said:

It doesn’t support individualisation. It talks an awful lot about it, and within Ofsted inspections it talks about being able to differentiate for learners, but it doesn’t support that. I don’t feel you can differentiate in teaching if everyone has the same outcomes, the same boxes that have to be ticked in the same time frame. It doesn’t work.

This is seen as a distinct feature of neoliberalism and points to interesting fractures between the constitutive functions of neoliberalism and traditional liberalism. The latter arguably constituted the citizen as an individual, composed of individual interests, tastes, ideas and preferences (and with a right to privacy in respect of these), but coming into the public sphere as part of a corporate political enterprise constrained by requirements for accountability. In terms of the latter, the exercise of reason in the critique of the institutions of public life was seen as an essential part of liberal democracy – and, of course, it is precisely the development of that skill which constitutes critical education. Neoliberalism, however, constitutes the citizen in precisely opposite terms, and it is this which participants are detecting when they describe the anti-individualist flavour of current educational practices. Under neoliberalism, the individual is reduced to those aspects which can be pigeon-holed, quantified and made visible in a positivist framework: gender, ethnicity, ‘learning style’ (eg Walsh et al 2011), ‘type of intelligence’ (eg Hoerr et al, 2010). These pre-determined criteria are then used as the basis for differentiation. How is one’s teaching adjusted to suit learning styles? Ethnicities? In a positivist education system, the answers to questions such as these are what is meant by treating students as individuals. One’s ‘individual’ characteristics are rendered visible and ‘managed’ in an apparent recognition of diversity which is, in the end, simply an act of repressive tolerance (Marcuse, 1969). Characteristics such as ‘learning styles’ and ‘types of intelligence’ find their sitz im leben in positivist psychology, where they are clearly linked to the quantification and standardisation of perceived traits, rather than to any notion of individuality. In fact, then, using such criteria as the basis for teaching is another example of how discourse which at first sight might seem to indicate inclusion and a concern for individuals has been recuperated by a paradigm which gives people false consciousness of being an ‘individual’ whilst classifying them and tallying their characteristics so that all teachers are asked to do to take into account
‘individuals’ is to cater for standardised characteristics in pre-defined ways. Thus the development of the individual student is evacuated of any criticality, any surprise, any creative spontaneity and the very concept of individuality is emptied of interiority.

A Splichalian analysis sheds further light on the constitutive forces at work here. The tallying of traits such as type of intelligence or learning styles can be located in the upper right hand quadrant of the analytic grid: this is what is rendered visible and counted as significant. In a positivist system, only that which is measured in this way matters, and so other aspects of individuality (e.g. a questioning of the status quo, a desire for social change) are rendered invisible, censored and discouraged (bottom right of the quadrant). The effect of this upon the individual is clear: conformity to predesigned criteria as a result of self-surveillance (bottom left of the grid) and the intrusive construction of the self as a set of traits to be managed (top left).

One participant said:

The current system has moved away from treating people as personalities. I’ve called it anti-personalist. There’s token emphasis on the personality and development of the personality, but it’s so subsidiary in practice, I don’t think it really counts. The system just tries to control everything, analyse, fragment personalities until they just become sort of bearers of grades.

The effects of this anti-personalism upon students was seen to be entirely negative and were characterised in two main ways. On one hand, some teachers said that some of their brightest students were well aware of the one-size-fits-all nature of their college and objected strongly to a system which factory-educated them. Some of the students were aware that this production-line approach to education was directed towards the working class:

I have a very bright student in sociology, he’s probably Oxbridge material. Very working class background and the first in his family to go to university. He said to me a few weeks ago that coming to college stops him being educated. He was really angry. He knew it wouldn’t be like that at a public school.

Some students, then, realised that their education was partial and instrumental and they knew that this approach to education got in the way of real knowledge. The fact that things were different for those who could pay only added insult to injury. On the other hand, some students had consented to the hegemonic view of education to the extent that they policed their own teachers and, if a teacher ventured off-syllabus or tried to introduce critical material, students complained – in some cases, to the college management. These students saw education in entirely instrumentalist terms and objected strongly if they were exposed to anything that they didn’t strictly need for their exam:
As long as they’re getting stuff for the exam then they’ll pay a bit of attention. But they don’t want to engage in the subject. I don’t know where that’s come from, but it’s new, at least on this scale.

Other commentators have noted this change in student attitudes under neoliberalism as students begin to frame themselves as customers rather than students. Saunders, for instance, writes:

> When the economic exchange between the student and the institution defines their relationship, it meaningfully redefines the nature of education by prioritizing customer satisfaction over teaching and learning, defining education from a creative process to a simple exchange, and emphasizing the importance of grades over all other educational outcomes. In turn, these transformations lead to a decreased focus on learning, a passive approach to education, and a restriction of the essential creativity that helps shape the educational process.  
> (Saunders, 2011: 3)

Teachers felt that their relationships with the students had, as a result, changed greatly for the worse. Whereas once they might have felt they were engaged in a cooperative educational enquiry with their students as willing co-creators and adventurers, they now felt that there was a distinct ‘us and them’ mentality developing and that students were picturing themselves as consumers with a right to a product supplied by the teacher. The product had to be something which could be exchanged for a good exam grade; not only were many students no longer interested in criticising the syllabus but they saw such criticism as an obstacle to exam success. Students had become much more aware of the value of educational currency such as a familiarity with mark schemes and examiners’ reports and they knew that education is a ‘game’ whose rules one needs to know in order to win. What they wanted from their teachers was not critique, but coaching in how to play the game. Moreover, they did not want a relationship of equals with the teacher and they did not picture themselves as collaborating on a journey of interest in its own right. They saw the educator as someone who could dispense items of useful exchange value. This inevitably had a distancing effect:

> The distance between the educator and the educated has increased. Barriers have been put up by the environment. So the extent to which you know the students, in terms of being able to bring their life experiences into the classroom, is reduced, and possibly it’s even seen as being inappropriate, to know the students in that way.

Some teachers felt that they were being pushed into a policing role themselves, and this was a role with which they felt distinctly uncomfortable. They felt that whereas once their relationships with students were based on understanding, knowing and liking, they were now based on policing, discipline and control. Teachers commented that it was increasingly difficult to incorporate students’ experiences in the classroom as the relationship of trust that enabled this approach to teaching was being stifled. This led to
more ‘teaching from the front’, which in turn increased the distance between teacher and students still further.

3.2.1e The environment has a negative impact on the participant

None of the participants interviewed felt that the atmosphere and policy context at work was supportive of what they thought of as ‘real’ education, which generally had a much more personalist and critical flavour than what they saw as the mainstream. A number of participants had been teachers for two or three decades or more and they remarked upon the ways in which they felt that things had become much worse in recent years. Two, especially, had recently left teaching, mainly because of the rise of what they saw as an unbearable instrumentalism, control and nihilism. One said:

I found it almost intolerable. Partly, I suppose, it was having spent twenty years trying to operate this approach to education that I believed in, I just felt, maybe I just got too tired, I don’t know, to carry on. So I found it intolerable.

The evident emotion in this response stayed with me and had a parallel in another transcript, where a participant was describing the growing anti-intellectualism in his former college:

I was made compulsorily redundant as the History and Politics courses were cut because the college wishes to remove A levels from its provision and place them in Academies. I should say that when I began my employment, there were eleven History teachers and five Politics. I was the last one of any of them, so there’s now no History provision anywhere inside ----- college. It would appear that the Principal is quite comfortable with that.

This teacher explained that the management at his college was entirely motivated by finances and reputation and that they were not interested in education as such, or in ideas. He said that the managers might as well have been working on a production line (back to the glue pots mentioned on page 75) or in a shop, since their main preoccupation was increasing profit. They did this through intensification of employees’ labour, rounds of redundancies, axing profitless courses and employing lecturing staff on casual, zero-hours contracts.

The emotional impact as these men described the death of idealism and the ends of their careers caused me to reflect further upon their experiences; it struck me forcibly that there were significant parallels in their career trajectories and life histories. Both were in their sixties and both had been radicalised as young men. They had lived through the Thatcherite attacks on Keynesian economics and progressive left politics (Davies and Bansel, 2007) and seen first-hand the impact of this upon the education system. Both participants saw a clear trajectory downwards from what they thought of as more
progressive, liberal, democratic or radical notions of education in the sixties and seventies to a much more restricted, deprofessionalised, instrumental environment characterised by greater surveillance and control, restrictions on academic freedom and anti-intellectualism. One, for instance, had taught A levels in Sociology, Media Studies, Health and Social Care and Critical Thinking over the course of twenty years. He said:

I enjoyed it for about ten years. Roughly. And then, let's say, central government controls became more and more *trammelling*, might be the right word. My last few years, I did enjoy the friendship of some very good, interesting, really pleasant people at work, but I did not like the work environment. I really in the end couldn't – well, I had to get out, basically. So I resigned.

Both had clearly come into education with a desire to ‘make a difference’ and both had found this increasingly difficult. Neoliberal values really had reversed the values dominant in earlier decades and this had had very far-reaching effects upon the lives of those who had entered teaching in the hope of working for social justice. These participants had entered teaching just prior to the decline of the postwar consensus and the era of the Great Debate and their critical values were antithetical to what they saw as a nihilist contemporary system. The human collateral damage of the rise of neoliberalism was very clear in these interviews.

A number of participants spoke out about the huge change in ethos in FE over the last few decades. This was seen as particularly marked in FE since this was once a sector where those who believed in second chances and social justice might seek employment. One teacher said:

Actually, people do go in because you believe in, if you like, the second chance – which has been now driven out. Further education has progressively lost its raison d'etre over the entire time I've been in it – over the last twenty or thirty years.

Another teacher talked about the way the function of FE in relation to wider society had changed; in his view, it had at one time had a “social service” ethos about it, where those who had, for whatever reasons, not been successful at school could be educated in a different way and turn their lives around. He said that this was no longer the case and that now the function of FE was as, “an adjunct to the economy to make people into good little workers.”

Several participants discussed the deprofessionalisation that had taken place in the sector over the years, where their autonomy had been progressively reduced so that now most aspects of their working life were under the control of people whose academic judgment was suspect. Their roles were much more prescribed and controlled by managers, and they had little freedom to make value judgments. Managers wanted them
simply to present balance and neutrality (as if these exist and as if they are always a good thing). One said:

A manager was observing me teach, it was a world development lesson and one of the students said to me, ‘What do you think of President Mubarak?’ This was the beginning of the Egyptian revolution, the Arab spring, you know – and I just said, ‘Oh, I think he’s a git.’ That was my considered opinion, you know! The observer wrote this down and I got told off for not giving a balanced view. A balanced view of President Mubarak!

Much has been written about the clashes between managerial and academic constructs of professionalism (see the review article by Boocock, 2015), the changing concepts of professionalism in relation to teaching in Further Education and the ‘proletarianisation’ of teachers. Hill, for instance, has written:

In sum, there has been increased managerialisation of schooling and intensification of teachers’ work … and the proletarianisation of teachers in schools and in further, higher and teacher education.

(Hill, 2007a: 213; see also Avis, 2005, Simmons and Thompson 2007, Atkins, 2011 and Mather, 2014)

The teachers interviewed for this thesis certainly felt that, insofar as professionalism implies autonomy, they had been deprofessionalised. In this, their views coincide with those of Smyth, who writes:

It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the work of teachers has largely been rendered down to that of being mere ‘technicians’ – implementing the technical/instrumental ‘how to’ agenda while all the important educational questions are decided by others far removed from schools, classrooms and communities.

(Smyth, 2011: 14)

Participants also felt that the new managerial frameworks within which they were expected to work were in many ways antithetical to ‘real’ education. Two of the participants were in fact in management positions themselves and both of them expressed unease at the degree to which they were expected to enforce compliance with instrumentalist values. One saw her role as trying to shield the teachers in her department from the worst excesses of managerial culture – she would speak out for individual teachers at management meetings, for instance, and try to ward off more senior managers who wanted to put various teachers on ‘informal capability procedures’. She characterised her job as like a battle-ground and said, “You have to choose your battles carefully.” The other participant in a management position said that she found the job so unpleasant that she was considering resigning the management position and
going back to just being a teacher, where, “At least I won’t have to make other people cry every day.”

Most of the teachers interviewed were determined to carry on despite the very real cost to them in terms of stress, limited opportunities for professional advancement, constant risk of redundancy and an ever-present sense of being a square peg in a round hole that ought to be square. However, three of the teachers interviewed (including the two mentioned above) had reached the limits of their tolerance and were looking for work elsewhere. One teacher had found alternative teaching outside FE in council-funded community learning, and she felt that in this latter environment she was still able to practise critical pedagogy. She said:

The work that I do for the local council, because that’s about challenging existing ideas about domestic abuse, about people who are victimised by it and people who perpetrate it – that really encourages critical pedagogy, because we’re challenging existing viewpoints, encouraging people to explore where their existing viewpoints come from. To go away and think, really, is the basis of the course.

She contrasted this with her work in FE, which she felt was dominated to an unacceptable extent by meaningless targets imposed from above. For her, the ability to teach in a way that resonated with her own values around social justice was so important that she was thinking seriously of leaving the FE sector. Similarly, another participant had left FE and tried working for the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) for a while; however, he found that a similar managerialist, audit culture had also begun to pervade that institution:

Since then, I have worked for the WEA … I stopped doing that largely because I hadn’t realised, I thought the WEA had a noble tradition of trying to help people to gain some education, and I didn’t realise that effectively it’s been taken over by Ofsted. Not literally, but it’s subject to Ofsted, you know, they depend on Government grants, they have to follow Ofsted’s methods and methodology and philosophy, which I thought – ‘What’s the point?’; frankly, so I left that.

This teacher had since found work as a tutor for students who couldn’t attend school; he was also hopeful that he might be able to contribute in some way to education through his contacts with his local Quaker community. In terms of regular FE, however, he had had enough.
3.2.2 Participants’ reasons and motivations for engaging in critical pedagogy

3.2.2a Social justice motivation:

Nearly all respondents, whether or not they were members of particular political organisations or religious groups, articulated a deep-felt desire for social justice. To many of them, this seemed a natural and unavoidable moral stance and one which, for many, had led them to become educators in the first place. In large part, their distress at finding themselves within an education system that was, as they saw it, at best uninterested in social justice and, at worst, the main state apparatus by which inequality is maintained and reproduced, was a result of extreme cognitive dissonance and profound moral unease.

One interviewee had personal experience of how life chances and opportunities had changed for her according to her economic and marital status at different points in her life, and this experience had deeply shocked her and exposed, for her, the myth of meritocracy. She said:

> It just seems so bizarre to me that whether or not you can be educated depends on where you start out. Because if I were still on my own as a single parent, there is no way I would have been able to afford to stop working, to pay college fees, to go back to college. It just wouldn’t have happened. Unfair sounds such a baby word, doesn’t it? But I haven’t got a stronger word that we can use. The thing is, it’s absolutely despicable. And it’s getting worse. It is. I can’t speak now. It is. It needs the little people to start saying, this is wrong and to do our little bit.

Most of the participants spoke of formative experiences in their own lives when they had become acutely aware of inequality in society – and, for most of them, these experiences were foundational in their decisions to embark upon a career in teaching. They had all viewed teaching as a means of transforming life chances for their students and, in some cases, as a means of helping to transform society. Certainly, teaching was also about fostering a love of a subject and developing people’s personalities – but the main impetus in every case for these teachers had been to improve the life chances of students who otherwise would have had restricted opportunities, and to do this by involving students in a critique of the society which curtailed those opportunities and sought to reproduce class relations. One teacher had worked for a while outside education in a variety of casual labouring jobs, including as a meat porter in the East End, and this experience had cemented his desire to work for more equality in society:

> It was obvious to me that there was no level playing field. I thought education would be the best way of levelling the field – and of showing
them who built the bloody great wall in the middle of the field in the first place.

3.2.2b Own experiences of teachers

A number of teachers mentioned the crucial impact their own teachers had had upon them. Some of these teachers had apparently used interesting approaches to critical pedagogy themselves - one participant said:

One of my teachers who, despite being a teacher at a grammar school was fairly left-wing, taught us to write essays by saying, “You need a thesis, an antithesis and a synthesis at the end!” Later on, when I read Marxist theory, it sounded familiar!

One or two made the point that it didn’t matter whether or not their inspirational teacher had been left or right wing – the important thing was that they had been encouraged to think critically and to engage with ideas. One said:

I had a religious studies teacher who, I think now, was possibly rather conservative. But she did encourage us to think about things from all angles.

Criticality is not, of course, limited to left wing teachers; ‘critical thinking’ is a skill which can be developed by teachers of all political persuasions and none – though, of course, such development would only become critical pedagogy in the sense meant by this thesis if linked with praxis and with a critique of social conditions and institutions. Critical thinking is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the development of critical pedagogy and a politically radical perspective.

Some respondents, then, had experienced education as facilitating critical, creative thought, and this had stayed with them as they developed their own style as educators, years later. Others, conversely, noted that they had felt disempowered by unsupportive teachers and that their negative experience of education had been the catalyst for wanting to become a teacher and teach in a different way. One respondent interpreted her own experience of schooling in the light of an A level Sociology textbook she had subsequently seen. As a rebellious teenager who misbehaved at school, she had had negative relationships with her teachers but had nonetheless gone on to do well in education, as indeed had a number of her friends (in contrast to Willis’ ‘lads’, 1977). This experience had been formative in her own desire to use critical pedagogy now that she was a teacher herself. Her explanation is presented here at length as it is a compelling illustration of the interplay between theory and praxis in developing a critical approach:

One of the sociology textbooks has a section introducing Marxism, maybe. Or maybe it’s illustrating the good points of functionalism ... it’s like a factory, and it shows the little people on factory lines, and the posh
ones go here and the not-so-posh ones go down there\textsuperscript{11}. I was brought up on a council estate in Blackburn. I think back to my secondary modern, because I failed the grammar tests. I remember our teachers always saying to us, because we weren’t conforming, ‘You’ll get nowhere in life. You’ll work behind a bacon counter.’ One of my friends really wanted to do a PhD in psychology, and the teacher said to her, ‘Somebody who goes to a secondary modern can’t do a PhD.’ And she’s just finished it now. She phoned the school and told them about it. That’s what inspires me, to think that anybody, given the choice and the right opportunity, can do anything that they want to do, but some people are more disadvantaged than others. If you just brainwash them with this idea that it’s equal opportunities, well, that’s a load of crap. They haven’t got an equal opportunity. That’s what makes me let people know what the situation is.

This teacher had clearly seen through the rhetoric of equality in a marketised system and had a very heightened awareness of how notional ‘equal opportunities’ do not take into account structural inequalities. Her own experience of studying the sociology of education at school had a direct impact on the way she now taught her own students. In her own teaching she was keen to help the students realise how systematic inequalities are reproduced and legitimised. The anger and sense of injustice she had felt in her own schooling was what now motivated her to use critical pedagogy even if this meant that in doing so, she put her own management position at risk. Once she had understood herself how education operates to reproduce the class system, she was determined to ensure that she exposed the way in which this reproduction operated.

\textit{3.2.2c Academic influences}

Several interviewees mentioned particular academic disciplines which had been especially helpful in enabling them to think critically. A notable example was social anthropology; one teacher said that this had shown him that there is an amazing variety of ways of being human and that this helped him to question the way our own society operates:

\begin{quote}
We could be very different. I’m not going to say every tribal society is wonderful, because they aren’t. But people can be a lot more cooperative. If someone says, we’re all bound to be competing, it’s human nature, well, actually, there are societies that seem to manage to be much more cooperative than us.
\end{quote}

Other subjects that had been particularly useful for many respondents were, perhaps predictably, sociology, politics, history and philosophy. One respondent, however, gave a more surprising answer – for him, it was his reflections on the nature of mathematics that had prompted him to think about critical approaches to education. He considered

\textsuperscript{11} Interestingly, this is the same approach referred to by the earlier participant who had thought Keith Joseph might have taken this as a “bloody good idea!” This second participant also thought the approach could be used by Marxists or (stood on its head) by the New Right.
maths to be a social construct or a language, not some Platonic absolute waiting to be discovered:

It isn’t everybody’s first language, so they’re immediately at a disadvantage. Because it is something that we’ve constructed as a society, then I think that we have a responsibility to let people in on it.

The same respondent, who was studying for a B.A. in Education, mentioned that since starting the degree he had come across the writing of Roseanne Benn (1997) and, especially, Marilyn Frankenstein (2010), who was much influenced by Freire and who discusses the underlying principles beneath critical pedagogy in mathematics. This had clearly inspired him in his own approach. Another student on the same course mentioned Freire and described how reading him had enabled her to name the pedagogy she had long been practising and gave her a language and an intellectual community. She commented that:

Within my B.A I found Freire. I thought – this is why it makes a difference. Things that before, I might have instinctively thought weren’t right or weren’t fair, I learned the language to challenge and how to challenge.

3.2.2d Commitments outside education:

The importance of finding a language and a community which supported critical practice was emphasised by a number of respondents and especially by those who situated themselves within a political organisation of one kind or another. Examples of political commitments mentioned by interviewees are the Green Party, the Labour Party and the Socialist Workers’ Party. One or two respondents had also been very active in teaching unions and had drawn strength from this. The importance of being aware of traditions and memories that presented alternative interpretations of history and current affairs was crucial to some:

One of the advantages I’ve always found [in belonging to a political organisation] is actually - I remember one of the little aphorisms of Tony Cliff – “the party is the memory of the class”. Being part of an organisation like that, you get access to memories, interpretations, experiences. The past speaks to you. You get to learn about the past, different ideas, and actually I gained so much from that that it would have been only by chance that I might have come across otherwise. You get it in very concentrated forms not only from books but from people – people with a lot longer experience, longer memories than myself. Things which had been forgotten … the thing about the organisation is that it switches on most lights.

In other words, membership of a group with a vibrant historical awareness enabled this respondent to access different kinds of perspectives and to realise that collective human action can make a difference. It also, he said, provides a way out of isolation and fear
and reinforces the desire and the means to bring about social change. Having an alternative perspective enabled him to see the non-neutral nature of the neoliberal ideology: just as the participant mentioned in the previous section knew from his study of anthropology that there certainly are alternatives to neoliberal capitalism, and that many of them are much more human, this participant knew from having access to his organisation’s collective memory that there have been times when people had different aspirations in education. From that perspective, the current arrangement is thrown into relief as the utilitarian, instrumentalist, nihilist system it is.

Several interviewees made it very clear that they drew strength from a religious perspective or from religious sources and that religious insights enabled them to maintain a critical distance from the, as they saw it, worst excesses of neoliberalism. Again, what they gained from religion was the ability to have a different perspective and set of values from the consumerist, neoliberal mainstream.

The boundary between religious and philosophical insights is not always distinct, of course, but there was a consistent emphasis from some respondents upon the liberating metaphysical and ethical views to be found outside ‘western materialism’, as one put it. This participant said he had been inspired by the religious or quasi-religious writings of Iris Murdoch (notably, *Metaphysics as a guide to morals*, 1993) and Don Cupitt (especially *Jesus and philosophy* 2009), as well as Berdyaev’s Christian existentialism and the Jesus presented in the synoptic and Gnostic gospels:

> I think Jesus was a thorough-going egalitarian, that’s what’s attractive to me. So all these things that I feel have helped me to detach myself from the prevailing ideologies that I can now see are destructive – and we don’t have to follow them. In fact, we have to find something else.

In addition to the response above, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) was mentioned by two participants as a radical organisation, interested in equality and justice and with a long tradition of respect for and nurturing of the individual. Certainly, Quakerism has a long history of opposition to injustice and has an active education programme around economics and social justice, including online material on how to combat neoliberalism (Quakers in Britain, no date).

All three people who spoke of religious influences mentioned that having an alternative value system enabled them to see through hegemonic neoliberal values and gave them some sense of community with others who likewise had a critical perspective on those values. This community helped them to withstand what they saw as professional isolation resulting from their critical stance in their colleges. One of the participants described how he felt a sense of professional isolation at work, almost as if he were speaking a different language from most of the teachers and managers – which, given
the recuperated nature of the language of social justice under neoliberalism, he probably was. He said that his values were radically different from theirs (which he thought consisted of “consumer goods, visible material success and ambition”); it was, he felt, important to communicate alternative value system to students but this did sometimes reinforce the gap he felt between himself and his colleagues. He said:

I’m not sure I could sustain this perspective without being part of the Quaker community, which helps me to feel that I’m not completely bonkers for not having a TV or not thinking that shopping is an interesting leisure pursuit!

Clearly, this participant found it very important that his professional approach was supported by a community outside of his educational setting. However, he also felt that being a member of a religious group also enabled colleagues and students to ‘Other’ him when he spoke out about his views – they could picture him, he said, as “a religious eccentric, quirky and harmless” and could tell themselves, he felt, that since they did not share his religious beliefs, they could dismiss his political beliefs. This suggests that whilst membership of groups with counter-hegemonic values can be very helpful in informing and sustaining critical pedagogy, it may also simultaneously disarm political critique.

Of course, the traditional Marxist perspective on religion is that it defers justice to an imaginary afterlife instead of seeking to address inequality in this life. For some of the participants in this thesis (as, indeed, for supporters of liberation theology and other radical approaches to religion), however, religion provided a means of critiquing capitalism here and now. It illuminated other possible ways of living and gave people a structure and community within which to develop alternative values and within which to cultivate non-commodified, non-utilitarian relationships.

### 3.2.3 How participants engage in critical pedagogy

#### 3.2.3a Encouraging a questioning approach

All of the participants stressed that encouraging students to question was very much at the centre of their pedagogical practice. This echoes Teitelbaum’s description of one of the core themes in counter-hegemonic education in the twentieth century USA, which is simply, “Getting children to ask ‘why?’” This enabled children to problematize the ‘common-sensical’ and raised their awareness of the power relations underpinning social institutions. (Teitelbaum, 2009:323)

The techniques by which teachers encouraged questioning varied considerably, from simply giving pictures and pieces of texts and asking students to describe what they see, to presenting students with writing frames to support dialectical analysis of ideas. For
example, one teacher said that when teaching about social history in 18\textsuperscript{th} century England, he started with Hogarth’s famous drawing, \textit{Gin Lane} (1751) and use this as stimulus material to ask a series of questions that led students to discuss not just material inequality and public health issues but also issues of power and interpretation of knowledge. His worksheet is reproduced in Appendix 2.

By gradually shining more and more lights from different angles on the source material, this teacher helped his students to (i) find out more about social conditions in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century – the substantive objective of the lesson; (ii) appreciate that interpretations of sources differ over time; (iii) understand that social conditions are imbued with power relationships; and (iv) develop an awareness that historians have different theoretical perspectives and interests. This teacher himself used an analogy of shining lights to explain his teaching methods:

\begin{quote}
It’s like in a different room with a number of lights around. The light which you put on throws a different kind of shadow, and once you click on another light, the shadow becomes different again. The first shadow doesn’t vanish, but it changes. What we are trying to do in critical pedagogy is click on some more lights and then have a look and think – “tell me what you see now.”
\end{quote}

This is critical pedagogy in action: students are guided through material which enables them to develop powerful knowledge as well as a critical appreciation of the ways in which knowledge and interpretation are produced; it also encourages them to question in a very profound way the material they study. Incidentally, this particular lesson would also include art criticism, discussion and debate, online research skills, appreciation of secondary sources and the ability to write a grade A answer to an exam question – there is not necessarily an antithesis between knowledge and skills. This approach mirrors that recommended by Kincheloe (2010), who has written about the necessity of using information from a variety of sources in order to encourage students to access issues of power and knowledge production:

\begin{quote}
Teaching about poverty does not simply involve providing statistics on how many people in a particular society are poor. In a critical context ... we would study why poverty exists, what it is like to live on a day-to-day basis in poverty, and what can be done to alleviate poverty around the world. Thus, there is a profound difference between a traditional understanding of poverty and a critical understanding of poverty ... epistemological curiosity moves us to search for diverse sources of information.
\end{quote}

(Kincheloe, 2008a: viii)
Another respondent elaborated on the way in which critical pedagogy encourages students to question social institutions and norms including the education system itself. He thought it was important to encourage students to reflect upon:

- the purposes of education – how society views education and therefore how the governmental administrative structures organise or attempt to organise education.

This respondent recognised that critical pedagogy could encourage structural analysis of the state apparatus supporting hegemonic views – in other words, for him, critical pedagogy has a very clear political agenda and links with questions of knowledge (“how society views education”) and power (“how the governmental administrative structures ...organise education”), echoing the concerns of Foucault (2008). There is a recognition here too of the way in which neoliberalism uses the state to structure and implement dominant views of what education is for. The participant went on to draw a contrast between the need to reflect on one’s own practice and the need to reflect on the state structures within which that practice takes place, thus aligning with Freirean concepts of critical pedagogy which demand an analysis of the structures within which experience is lived. The need to reflect upon power was reiterated by another participant:

Critical pedagogy criticises the power structures and orthodoxies and hegemony. A kind of counter-hegemonic project, rather than just being a tool for the establishment and just teaching what’s expected.

When I probed further and asked why this mattered so much, her answer was straightforward – “it’s questioning the structures of education that have kept them out, before.” This clearly mattered a very great deal to this participant who, as a young woman, had left school herself at sixteen, thinking education wasn’t for her. She had only returned to studying in her thirties and had surprised herself by how well suited she was to it.12

Another teacher told me that he felt compelled to encourage questioning simply because it was impossible not to challenge harmful ideas. He said:

If you recognise something as an assumption that is creating havoc, you can’t not challenge it – once you’ve recognised that, and once you’ve realised that the prevailing assumptions aren’t set in stone, they’re not ‘natural’, they’re created, you can’t not challenge them.

This theme – that once one had seen through the apparent neutrality of hegemonic ideas oneself, then as a teacher one really had a duty to challenge them – was developed by another participant, who railed against ‘common sense’ presentations of knowledge. He

12 This participant went on to gain a first class honours degree and is now studying for a Master’s degree in education.
pointed out that common sense is an indispensable way of dealing with the practicalities of life but that it needed interrogating when it came to statements about social reality:

If you’re trying to work out how society works, don’t use common sense, because it’s common sense that women should stay home and do the housework and it’s common sense that some groups are inferior. It’s not common sense – it’s what society has decided – and that can be changed. What you should be doing is to look at the reasons why that has happened historically. Are there any other possible ways of organising society that might be better? What are the possible ways of bringing that about? Critical pedagogy involves giving people the tools to critically analyse the world, though not necessarily giving them the answers to everything.

The maths teacher, meanwhile, told me about how he encouraged students to question statistics and sets of figures and to look for power relationships and contexts. He said he encouraged his students look at ‘everyday’ examples of how maths is used to exploit those who are not very numerate:

We were just talking the other day in class about being able to work out offers in the supermarket, and the fact that there will be a range of offers and then above one of them are the words ‘best value’ and everyone goes to the ‘best value’... but they’re being manipulated! It’s the one they want to use to clear their stock that week! Even those little things would make a huge difference to your own life.

I asked this teacher for further examples of how maths can be taught in a critical way and he spoke mostly about statistics and enabling students to spot the differences between causes and correlations. He gave the interesting example that, if we just look at official statistics in an uncritical and accepting way, we might form the idea in education that children from single parent families do less well than those from nuclear families, since this is what the statistics seem to tell us at first glance. However, he pointed out that in fact children from less affluent backgrounds are the ones who do less well, and that once variables are controlled in that way, then there is no difference between the achievement of children from single parent families and that of children from nuclear families. Poor children do less well regardless of family structure. It’s just that more single parents tend to live in poverty. He explained:

This is why it matters so much. There are two main reasons. One is – if I’m a kid from a single parent family, I immediately feel those unquestioned statistics put me in a box. Or if I’m a single parent, I immediately feel I’m disadvantaging my kid. The other is that policy is based on evidence. So if the evidence suggests that kids from single parent families do less well in education, then the policy solution might be to discourage single parent families – perhaps by having tax breaks for couples and cutting benefits for single parents and so forth. But if the evidence suggests that poverty is the culprit, not family structure, then the policy, logically, should focus on reducing poverty – in other words, increase single parent benefits! The exact opposite.
Again, it is clear to see that this participant was motivated by a strong sense of fairness and social justice and that he felt it was his moral duty as a maths teacher to give his students a language which would help them to tackle injustice and inequality on their own behalf. He felt that some maths teachers in schools actually have an interest in preserving a sense of mystery around maths and that this was done because they enjoyed the special status which being maths teachers conferred upon them. This teacher felt that this was an abuse of their position and that much more effort needed to be put in to make maths a language spoken by all. Interestingly, he was quite dismissive about functional maths classes, which he didn’t regard as giving already disadvantaged students any powerful knowledge:

It’s just patronising, really, to assume that kids from some backgrounds only need maths to measure out a piece of wood or a pipe. Talk about limiting their horizons. They need more than that if maths is going to make a difference to their lives.

For many of the participants, critical pedagogy went beyond consciousness raising and involved practical action too:

For me, it’s challenging taken-for-granted ideas and views. And it’s creating an awareness of how those taken-for-granted ideas are probably not in everyone’s best interests. So it’s creating an environment where an awareness of that can exist. And now that we’re aware, what can we do to change and challenge those things?

This participant worked with students in A level Citizenship classes to explore practical ways of challenging power imbalances in society; they had, for example, taken part in a recent anti-austerity march; they had emailed their MP to protest against tuition fees and they had campaigned against the closure of a local library. In these ways, the Citizenship curriculum was used to unite theory and practice and to foster an empowering sense that students can change the world.

3.2.3b Being honest with students

Participants spoke about the need for honesty in three main ways in their responses:

i) There was a perceived need for honesty about the education system and students’ position within it;

ii) Participants spoke about the need to be open about their own characters and lives; and

iii) There was a unanimous view amongst those interviewed that teachers should be honest about their own beliefs and perspectives.

First, contrasts were drawn between an insular, self-referential, self-perpetuating system which might expect students to obey rules for their own sake and which would
deliberately obscure the truth of the students’ situation (and which enabled less critical teachers to assume for themselves some kind of status as bearers of privileged knowledge) and a critical desire to cast as much light as possible on all kinds of situations, including and most obviously the education system itself, in order to educate students in meaningful ways. For example, one respondent said:

Quite often students will say, ‘Why do we have to do key skills? Why do we have to do this? Why do we have to do the other?’ And I’ve tried giving them the spin – oh, it’s good, it will help you in life – but then eventually, I’ll just tell them the truth and say, ‘Look, you have to do this because then we get the funding for A, B and C. I don’t think I’m supported in that. Quite often, at managers’ meetings, they’ll say, ‘Don’t let students know this.’ It’s dishonest and manipulative, not to let students know. Why would you not? And I know I shouldn’t say it, but I can’t resist, because it’s the truth. It is the truth, and they should know about the education system, perhaps especially in social sciences.

At that time in English Further Education, funding was driven by qualification rather than by student – the more qualifications a student achieved, the more funding a college received. This meant that some colleges encouraged students to pursue multiple courses as ‘additionality’ in order to receive multiple pots of funding per student. (This practice was roundly criticised in the Wolf Report 2011, with the result that subsequently funding in FE was student-led rather than qualification-led.) The reason for studying Key Skills given to the students by the participant’s college management, however, was that Key Skills was an important qualification which would equip students for success in the labour market. This may or may not have been true but it was certainly not the whole truth. By bringing to light the suppressed truth, this participant was directly engaged in the critical pedagogical task of questioning structures and accepted meanings in order to encourage students to become engaged with their own lives and active in questioning the circumstances of those lives. It seems clear that this approach to education not only holds more integrity than that of the dissembling managers who did not want students to know about the underlying reasons for having to study Key Skills, but that it also demonstrates the empowering nature of critical enquiry to the students.

Secondly, some participants felt that their own character was their most influential teaching aid and that this could be harnessed in the interests of critical pedagogy. One said:

I think Erich Fromm says that teachers’ main influence on people, is them, their person, their being, if you like. That’s – I suppose it’s a typical existentialist approach, really. The way you are. I don’t think you can be criticising inequality if you are craving status. You know, climbing career ladders and looking for status and things like that.
This teacher spoke about an incident where some students had met him at his (modest, terraced) house before going on a trip to a nearby university and they had been surprised that he didn’t live somewhere more expensive. The teacher felt that it had been a good learning opportunity for his students, however, to show them that critical attitudes imply a commitment to a certain kind of life outside of the classroom – in his case, one where his modest house was full of books but otherwise unremarkable. He felt that this relationship with the students subsequently gave his teaching an added integrity and that students were able to understand his perspective better once they had connected what he was saying with how he chose to live. He said:

I’ve tended, I hope, to just have a sort of egalitarian style, informal style. It should show in your whole life, really. It’s not like you walk into a classroom and you become an egalitarian. Because I think students pick that up. It’s your personality and your beliefs that come across in your teaching.

Third, all participants felt strongly that it was entirely appropriate for them to be open about their own politics and values, so long as they gave their students tools with which to criticise them and alternative points of view. All of them were suspicious of what they saw as a phony neutrality projected by college management, since they felt that no position was neutral and that it was important to name New Right managerialism, utilitarianism and instrumentalism in education as such. One also, as we have seen, felt that the emphasis on remaining neutral could lead to vacuous positions where even murderous dictators had to have a good side. One lecturer explained how she thought that students were presented with a type of default right wing perspective, masquerading as neutral, in college in general, and that this justified her in spending more time on sociology classes criticising functionalist views than critical perspectives:

I find that I’ll challenge a functionalist view much more than I would challenge a feminist or a Marxist view. And if I were being ‘neutral’ I wouldn’t, would I? But I suppose I think, well, most of what they get from the rest of school and the rest of society is going to be fairly right wing and functionalist, so in fact I feel fairly justified in putting forward the Marxist-feminist point of view above others, actually, in sociology.

Another participant pointed out that there was no neutral position in any case and that therefore the only honest thing to do was to be open with the students about one’s position. He commented:

I remember when I first started teaching here, there was a sociology teacher who said, whatever your politics are you should keep it out and be impartial when you’re teaching. I remember having that discussion with her and I didn’t think that you could be or you should be, that we all - you know, if you don’t say something, that’s supporting another position anyway. Or your view would come through subliminally –
because you can’t pretend objectivity – so if you’re upfront, it’s a more honest approach.

This teacher had given this issue a great deal of thought over his ten years in teaching Politics and History and had come to the conclusion that the best way to approach the dilemma was to harness his own views as the starting point for critical pedagogy. He would present his own view of an issue but then be very careful to ensure that students had opportunities to criticise his view and to consider alternative views. He told me that if nobody in the class offered a criticism, then he would make sure that he criticised the view himself – for instance, he would tell students what a neoliberal view of the issue might be. This scrupulous fairness was evident with many of the teachers interviewed, who thought that they had to ensure that students knew that not everybody agreed with their critical approach. In this, critical teachers differ markedly from non-critical teachers who present the curriculum as if it were ‘neutral’.

Another teacher said that her approach was to be straightforward and honest about her own opinions and perspectives and (i) to invite students to criticise them as robustly as possible and (ii) to encourage them as much as possible in the development of their own views by providing them with appropriate resources. For instance, one student had shown a clear interest in liberalism and the free market in a Citizenship class; she explained to him her own views and encouraged him to read Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) but also provided him with extracts from Mises and Hayek and a copy of Ayn Rand’s 1957 novel, Atlas Shrugged (Rand, 2007). She said that she enjoyed being challenged by her students and that it was good for them to see that she was “genuinely delighted by and responsive to” these challenges. She felt that by doing this, she was actually modelling a critical engagement with ideas, and that this was a fundamental part of her critical pedagogy. Her enthusiasm was clear as she explained her approach in more detail:

I suppose I’m honest about my starting point and then the students can also see the journey I go on if they challenge me. Also, I’m often genuinely struggling with a particular perspective or theory – I might be finding it difficult to integrate it with other theories and values and it might be a potential catalyst for me to enlarge or move on from my current views. I love that process. In terms of critical pedagogy, then, I can bring that catalyst into class and get the students to play around with it too – they catch my excitement at the hatching of new ideas, I think, and it ignites their excitement too. So I’m honest about my position – but this means I’m honest about the fact that my position changes in response to evidence and argument, and so they can see what genuine learning is like.
3.2.3c Empowering students:

One respondent returned again and again in her interview to the moral duty to empower students through raising their awareness of social structures and their impact on students' lives. She felt that an understanding of the education system was especially important for her students, who needed to know how it shaped their lives. They needed to know why the curriculum is like it is and who sets the curriculum and makes decisions about the knowledge that young people should have. By fostering this critical approach to knowledge, the teacher said that she was encouraging her students to be “good citizens” who could, “take part in their own life” rather than experience alienation.

The interviewees equated empowerment with honesty and openness and with giving the students as much information as possible about their own situation both in education and in wider society. One teacher said that this helped students to see that the system was unfair and stacked against them, and that once they had seen this, then students knew it wasn’t that they were a failure personally – rather, they were fighting unfair odds and were never supposed to win in the first place. This knowledge, she said, is empowering and liberating and encourages students not to be compliant.

Treating students as equals was also considered to be crucial, as was making sure that students understood the relevance of the material presented to them and could use it in ways to improve their own lives. One participant described how she tackled this with a group of women returners to education who had been referred to her course by social services:

I say, “Ok, so you want to be a better mum. What does being a better mum mean to you?” Because it doesn’t have to mean that I can bake blueberry pies. For some mums, it’s about that. For other mums, it’s about, well, maybe if I just don’t shout often. So it’s about getting them to choose the area in which they’re looking to effect a change, and then also for them to set how far they want to go with that.

One teacher spoke with feeling about how she felt it was her role to help her students develop the skills and confidence to challenge injustices in their own lives and in wider society. Her students had, she felt, an awareness that things were not fair, but they had limited knowledge about how to tackle this injustice. She said:

Many of my learners know things aren’t fair, they know things aren’t right, they know that they get treated differently by social services than other people do. They know they get judged. But they don’t know how to challenge it. And when they try and challenge it – because they challenge it inappropriately – that reinforces the stereotypes people have of them. We spend a lot of time on the course looking at communication skills and at how to put your point across assertively. Not aggressively, but assertively! Having the social worker by the throat is not a good idea, ok?
That will not make her leave your children with you! Although we're jokey, it’s the basis of everything – if we don’t communicate effectively with school or with social services when we’re being scrutinised – you don’t have a chance.

I asked her to explain a little about how she worked with her students to help them to see the power structures in society, and she described at length how she used stories in the media to expose differential treatment of people of different classes. The course was focussed on parenting and so she looked for stories that showed how parents of different classes were treated differently in the press. She explained that her class had spent a great deal of time considering the way the press and other agencies such as social services had reacted to the disappearance of Madeleine McCann. Her students had come to the conclusion that McCann’s parents had been treated sympathetically by social services because they were middle class; the students felt that if one of them had left a child in a hotel abroad whilst they went drinking, they would have been pilloried. The teacher said:

You remember that case a few years ago where the woman, must have been in her forties, she’d taken her fifteen year old to India, and she’d left her fifteen year old with friends she knew very well while she went off with some of her other children, which actually seems quite reasonable, and was vilified, wasn’t she?13 Probably because she had tattoos and lived in a caravan. But Dr and Mrs McCann, they left their two year old while they went out drinking. Nothing’s been said. And as one of my learners said, if she lived at Wyke, when she got off that plane, the rest of the kids would have been taken.

This teacher went on to explain how she used sociology to empower her students by helping them to understand the structural causes of their situations. Once they had understood this, and that these structures were social constructions and were therefore open to challenge, her students found these courses life-changing. The teacher made sure, moreover, that she didn’t just teach the theory of how the socially constructed causes of inequality could be changed – she helped her students to bring about change directly in their own lives. In this way, they united theory and practice with powerful results. The teacher gave an example of how she had done this:

We had one of the women having real issues with the local school. Four young children, four under eights. One of them’s quite regularly not going to school because one’s poorly, or baby’s ill, or whatever, and she was getting into an awful lot of trouble with the school for not ringing into school. She would text a friend and get her friend to ring into school for her, but school were not happy with that – they wanted her to ring. The underlying issue why she couldn’t ring was because many days, she didn’t have credit on her mobile, but she could send free texts. So it was as simple as talking to this woman as an equal, getting to explain the situation, saying, “Well, let’s explain this to school.” We went to see

13 http://www.express.co.uk/expressyourself/38345/Trial-of-Scarlett-s-hippy-mum
school together, and advocated for her, and got her to speak a little bit for herself. Just explaining to school that for some people – not everyone can afford mobile phone contract. Because again, this is what often the people in the positions of power think - everybody has a contract, everybody has a car, everybody has this, and the reality is that we don’t. It’s about being able to put that across in a reasonable manner, an acceptable manner, so that you’re heard.

She explained how the class had linked this incident with a discussion of the sociology of education. She and her students had discussed the New Right view that working class children did less well in education because of their parents’ attitudes and values – for example, their parents didn’t attend parents’ evenings because they were not interested in their children’s education. The teacher explained that she and her students had talked about how they can’t actually get to parents’ evenings very often – not because of a lack of interest, but because they did not have cars or money for transport, or they were working or looking after younger children and could not afford a babysitter, her students were enraged that sociologists might then label them as having the wrong values to help their children succeed in education – from their point of view, they were doing all that they could on a very limited income and in very difficult circumstances.

The teacher felt that this powerful combination of theory and direct action was her way of putting critical pedagogy into practice. Her commitment to the students was extraordinary and her belief that she had a duty to use her own relatively privileged position to contribute towards improving their life chances was unwavering.

3.2.4 What would help participants to sustain a critical practice in the future?

3.2.4a Support from within the education system

Participants talked with great feeling about the changes they wished to see at different levels within the education system itself. As teachers, the most direct and immediately helpful resource for many of them would be simply to have more time to reflect upon and develop resources and strategies for critical pedagogy. Many of them felt that their jobs were so overloaded with tasks related to surveillance and tracking and providing evidence of the job they were doing that there was little room actually to do the job they wanted to do. This intensification of labour is widely recognised as a characteristic of employment under neoliberalism and has been charted in FE by Avis et al (2001), amongst others.

One participant talked again about how the education system needed to give time and attention to the process of education rather than to the outcomes of education:
I think we need to start valuing the learning journey, rather than just the outcome, and having time to enjoy the learning journey.

Another spoke about the desirability of having more control over the curriculum – for him, that element of autonomy was a crucial part of education and something he recalled from his early days in teaching. He thought it was unlikely that there would be a return to the degree of curriculum freedom he had had in the 1970s but he felt he would welcome any movement in that direction. He realised the extent of the task, however, in a society in which younger teachers were used to the National Curriculum and close regulation of A level specifications and were afraid to innovate. He pointed out that most younger teachers had no concept of curriculum design and seemed lost if they were not provided with specifications and schemes of work. In his experience, they expected to be told what to teach and found it burdensome if their colleges did not supply them with schemes of work and lesson plans:

They seem lost if they aren’t given a specification and maybe even a scheme of work, which is really just a means of operationalising someone else’s curriculum. I think we’ve become afraid of the responsibilities of creating a curriculum because we’re in such a blame-culture – you know, teachers are put onto capability proceedings at the drop of a hat now, and that scares everyone to the point where nobody wants to take responsibility for anything.

The motif of the blame culture was picked up by other participants who felt that one of the things which would help them most would be supportive managers:

We’re all so aware that we’re accountable every minute of the day. Managers intensify this – they want daily tracking of student progress, schemes of work on the VLE, details of interventions and impact, CPD related only to pushing up results, whatever. And if your results falter, then your job is on the line. It’s actually quite terrifying and I’m sure it is counterproductive because we won’t innovate, we play safe, we have no loyalty to the institution apart from that which we have for our students, we have no sense of collegiality. It could be completely different. We could have schools where managers absorbed the box-ticking pressures more, where CPD involved subject-based conferences, where teachers discussed critical pedagogy, where there was job security and room to develop.

Those teachers who were also managers echoed these sentiments and made it clear that they didn’t like their policing role. They wanted genuinely to be supportive of colleagues as far as possible; one said that management should be like teaching in that it should differentiate and try to draw out the skills, talents and interests of individual staff members, rather than trying to force staff members into a pre-shaped box.

Other teachers spoke of the desire to link their teaching with enrichment activities such as theatre trips, concerts, debating societies and trips abroad, but again they felt that the time constraints and a culture of blame made it difficult to do these things. One said:
Ok, so I know I’m going to be measured against my students’ results. So the pressure is on to focus only on drilling the students to get good grades, incessantly. Why, in that atmosphere, would I spend time planning trips or extra-curricular stuff? It might make the students more rounded but it’s not valued by management and students themselves increasingly only want stuff that helps them with exams. It’s really sad.

As well as a change in the managerial culture in schools, several teachers discussed the need for support from teacher educators. They felt that teacher education was similarly under siege in a neoliberal culture and that in some cases it had, inevitably, capitulated to a model that focussed upon managerialism and a behaviourist approach to educational psychology. One teacher in particular was critical of this approach:

The educational psychology or ‘learning theory’ taught on teacher training programmes is shallow and outcomes-based too. Foucault says that management and psychology are both attempts to massage people into the system. I think this is very much so in education and even in teacher training. Why even bother looking at things like Sue Cowley – Getting the Buggers to Behave14? You might as well go into animal training.

These teachers wanted teacher educators to give trainees a solid grounding in critical approaches to education and felt that there was a need to keep the sociology of education very firmly at the centre of teacher education programmes. One teacher said:

I did the post-16 teacher training course and I don’t recall anything critical on the course. There was stuff about the policy context but not in any critical way, and the approach to pedagogy was quite superficial. It might just have been the college I studied at, but I do think there needs to be at least some space for critical education on these courses.

Orr (2009: 12) has described how trainee teachers “learned to be marginal” and had no real concept of teaching as a collaborative activity; clearly, the focus on management and psychology rather than sociology and politics on teacher education programmes is likely to entrench this. Other academics and teacher educators who have written about the increasing instrumentalism in teacher education. Atkins, for instance, has described how:

the detailed and prescriptive competency based structure of contemporary teacher training in the FE sector, together with wider regulation such as Ofsted and LLUK endorsement requirements, is productive of teachers who are instrumental and conformist but who lack the knowledge to engage with the concerns for social justice which are fundamental to working in the FE sector. In turn, these teachers deliver an instrumental and competency based vocational curriculum which ... is complicit with other systems and structures in education in the reproduction of labour and of social class.

(Atkins, 2011: 2)

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14 Cowley (2014)
Atkins and others have called for an overhaul of the approach to Initial Teacher Education in the FE sector in order that it might better facilitate the development of critical approaches and concerns for social justice in trainees. An example of what a critical teacher education curriculum might look like can be found in Hill (2007a).

3.2.4b Support from outside the education system

Teachers recognised, of course, that the education system does not operate in a vacuum and that it is a (central) part of a wider web of inter-related social institutions. Several participants mentioned the need to work with others outside of the education system to bring about counter-hegemonic change and to locate the discussion about education within a broader discourse about social and political change. For example, one said:

I’d like to adapt Karl Marx, saying the people get the government they deserve – I’d say, you get the education system you deserve as well. So the challenging doesn’t happen just in classrooms, it happens constantly, wherever you are. Well, obviously, you don’t want to become a bore! You can’t just go on about it all the time, but it’s got to be challenged wherever you find it. Society doesn’t end at the classroom walls.

One teacher spoke about how his connections with a Quaker religious community sustained him and gave him hope for social transformation. For him, Quakers offered an example of a small but potentially influential group whose radical ideology and practice might be a useful support for other teachers too. Another participant spoke about the need for those who are critical of neoliberalism to join forces and he saw some hope in the Occupy movement and other protest movements which had developed in recent years. He thought these movements offered very strong evidence of a desire for social justice throughout different sectors of society and that, although protests were now dying down, the energy that gave rise to them could be remobilised. He also felt it was very positive that these protest had happened globally and said:

The problems neoliberalism poses for us are problems faced everywhere – it’s a global strengthening of the position of the capitalist classes at the expense of the working classes. And that realisation puts us in a position of strength. The rich have worked together globally for some time, haven’t they? Now it’s our turn to mobilise. If capital has no borders, then people should have no borders.

One or two of the teachers were very clear about the obstacles in the way of political change, and they made the very valid point that just as education workers need the support of other workers, so the working class needs an education system that has some potential to back up its message:

There are all sorts of problems, obviously, and most of these illustrate how hegemony works and how it gets the consent of the oppressed. You don’t need to send in the tanks. You just need to say – look, the real
problem is not the rich, it’s immigrants – they’re the ones causing the economic crisis. Or people on benefits. Or human rights! Bloody hell! Hats off to them when they can convince us to vote against our own rights! Now, that's where we come in as educators, surely. It’s our job to help those kids to see that the real causes of oppression and poverty and job insecurity have nothing to do with immigrants or people on the dole.

Finally, two of the participants who were members of UCU Left (the radical left wing of the Universities and Colleges Union\textsuperscript{15}) spoke about the ways in which the UCU was providing support in terms of policy analysis and activism; they said that a strengthening of this support across the teaching unions would be helpful and they felt critical of what they saw as in-fighting within unions which meant that radical causes could get side-lined.

\textbf{3.3 Analysis of themes}

This section presents a summary of the key themes derived inductively from the data and then subjects the themes to a Splichalian analysis.

Teachers who engage in critical pedagogy offer a wide-ranging and trenchant critique of neoliberalism and its impact upon the education system. In particular, teachers are critical of the fundamental values upon which neoliberalism is based. They see these values as nihilistic, anti-personalist and utilitarian and they consider that these values lead to an atmosphere of surveillance and control at work, which reduces teachers’ autonomy and radically alters the nature of the teacher-student relationship for the worse. According to these teachers, neoliberalism has resulted in an education system which is anti-educative and which is mainly a means for reproducing and legitimising the class system.

A concern for social justice and equality impels these teachers to try to counter the neoliberal message (about education and wider society) in their own professional lives. Many of them draw upon personal experiences of injustice both in education and wider society. Others have been inspired by critical educators in their own schooling. Teachers also draw upon a range of political, academic and religious influences which show them that alternative interpretations, perspectives and value systems are possible and so these teachers can readily see through the hegemonic presentation of neoliberalism as neutral and value-free. This gives them the strength and resources to carry on with their work as critical teachers.

These teachers say that the most important aspects of critical pedagogy centre around values rather than techniques. In particular, they see it as very important to encourage

\textsuperscript{15} http://uculeft.org/
students to question everything, including the teachers themselves. Honesty is seen as crucial, and this means being truthful with students about their own position in the education system and in wider society. It also means that teachers should be open and honest about their own lives, values and perspectives. Teachers feel that these approaches lead to empowerment for students, especially if linked to strategies for practical action too. Theory and action intertwine to produce life-changing educative practices.

Teachers say that they need support in several ways to continue this practice. Within the education system itself, teachers want more support from people with power and influence, especially managers and teacher educators. They want more opportunity to develop the curriculum and to provide enrichment activities for students. Teachers also point out that education is part of a broad web of social institutions and say it is crucial that those with a critical perspective in many walks of life – politics, religion, unions – work together to bring about change.

In essence, then, critical teachers feel that the positivist culture of surveillance under neoliberalism has got things backwards: where the individual should matter and the personality should be developed, under neoliberalism the individual is reduced to a statistic; where critical reasoning should be the method by which public discourse is conducted and checked, under neoliberalism criticality is disparaged and rendered marginal; where honesty and openness are essential in the educative process, under neoliberalism, false consciousness holds sway and is bolstered by a fragmented, instrumentalist curriculum in place of a holistic, connected view of learning; where education should encourage questioning and the development of a range of alternative viewpoints, under neoliberalism students are encouraged to accept hegemonic values as natural and neutral.

The findings of this thesis articulate with Splichal’s analysis of the functions of publicity, surveillance and censorship in that Splichal argues that those activities which were once thought to be properly in the public realm, such as the exercise of critical rationality in an attempt to move closer to a (counterfactually and metaphysically) ideal state, are now censored by capitalist interests who wish to safeguard their own position from criticism. The views of the participants in this thesis are precisely that attempts at critical discussion are censored or marginalised in a system that functions to preserve and justify the power and position of the wealthy.

Splichal’s argument is that forcing the private realm into public life is a particularly damaging and insidious form of censorship / symbolic violence. Under neoliberalism, that which is properly interior, in the private sphere (under classical liberalism) is eroded
and replaced by a set of measurable characteristics. Our education system not only no longer equips young people to develop a meaningful private life or sense of self, it actively discourages this. Further, that which classical liberalism would place in the public sphere (civil society, engagement in politics, work) undergoes a reversal: neoliberalism fragments public life and discourages collective action and the use of critical reason in public life. For instance, membership of trade unions has plummeted during the period coinciding with the rise of neoliberalism – in 1979, membership of trade unions in the UK stood at 13 million; this had fallen to 6.5 million by 2013. (DBIS, 2014:5) We educate our children to view themselves as marketable commodities who can ‘monetise’ their skills, not as active citizens of a participatory democracy. The effect of this on students is far-reaching: young people’s engagement in formal politics has declined significantly (Henn and Ford, 2011) and students are instead encouraged to express their identity through their consumer choices. Under neoliberalism, publicity is given to ‘celebrities’, life is commodified and atomised and constantly paraded as spectacle. Public reason and public engagement are devalued, and the effect on individuals is the constitution of the self as a marketable commodity and a reluctance to engage in collective action or exercise public reason.

Splichal contends that the transformation (or recuperation, or co-option) of the meaning of once-critical concepts can be seen clearly in the context of the press, where the concept of ‘publicity’ has transitioned from a Benthamite construction (the press as the fourth estate, exercising a kind of surveillance over power actors) to the contemporary linkage with advertising and spectacle:

There is no doubt that the prevailing concept of “publicity” has definitely lost its critical sign that it had in the age of Enlightenment and now prevalently denotes the promotion of commodities and interests through advertising and public relations.

(Splichal, 2006b: 110-111)

Splichal argues that whereas for Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant and Bentham, a key counterbalance to the abuse of power by the state was the public exercise of reason (“publicity” in its original sense), “publicity” now refers to a manufactured visibility and is related to the interests of capital. These interests are able to conceal themselves in the media behind the discourse of old-style censorship (“the critique requesting restrictions on commercial communication is rebutted by media corporations on the ground that it wants to introduce censorship”; ibid. 111).

The same interests conceal themselves in education behind the co-opted discourse of ‘reflection’ and ‘communities of practice’. In the media, one runs the risk of being accused of censorship if one objects to the capitalist hegemony; in education, one runs
the risk of being accused of secrecy or of refusing to participate. In education, one’s participation might be further encouraged through ‘mentoring’ and ‘coaching’ or other management strategies, where:

The resister is cast as social deviant, and is normalized through coercive or therapeutic procedures.

(Ball, 1990b: 158)

Several participants spoke, indeed, of how they had been ‘coached’ or mentored by managers in an attempt to defuse their critical perspectives; others had been subject to more coercive processes such as capability procedures. Critical thinking, openness and questioning - all attitudes or activities valued by Enlightenment thinkers - are subjected to a reversal of values under neoliberalism, so that they now appear as threatening, deviant and disruptive.

In this way, we can see that the neoliberal structural censorship of critical approaches, combined with the imposed visibility of targets and outcomes, constitute the self (teachers and students) in the education system in precise ways which are anathema to those who were interviewed for this thesis. Criticality, honesty and equality (between teachers and students, or between teachers and managers) become deviant; acquiescence, secretiveness and hierarchy become normalised.

The findings indicate that the neoliberal hegemony is not all-determining and that participants were able to criticise neoliberal values from the perspective of alternative value systems. It was noteworthy that the participants in this thesis had strong affiliations (intellectual or participatory or both) with alternative perspectives supplied by, especially, membership of political organisations (including the Green Party, the Labour Party and the Socialist Workers’ Party), links with religion and/or a strong academic background in a wide range of subjects, including sociology, anthropology, history, politics, philosophy and, interestingly, modern foreign languages and mathematics. These alternative perspectives had enabled participants to see that the values of neoliberalism were not neutral and that there most certainly is an alternative.

Overwhelmingly, participants said that the root of critical pedagogy was honesty and openness. Whereas the secrecy and control inherent in neoliberalism was disempowering for students (and teachers), questioning and candour and bringing things into the light were essential aspects of empowerment. Utilitarianism was seen as a bankrupt moral perspective underpinning neoliberalism; participants preferred an ethic which treated people as an end in themselves. In terms of Splichal’s grid, critical pedagogy flips the
grid around its axes, so that what is hidden under neoliberalism becomes open, whilst what is forced into visibility becomes again properly private.

There is, therefore, room for hope in at least three ways. First, precisely because the gatekeepers can be moved along the axes of Splichal’s analytic grid, the radical educational agenda could involve a consistent attempt to resist the movement of gatekeepers further into the inner or private realm. By reversing Splichal’s grid, one can see that the radical agenda entails resistance to the surveillance of the private realm, increased scrutiny of the powerful (e.g. of the capital interests behind propaganda) and resistance to the suppression of the views of the (involuntarily) socially excluded. Such actions would become all the more powerful if espoused by teachers, teacher educators, union activists and counter-hegemonic groups outside of education. As Splichal says,

What we should do then is to readdress the conception of ‘authoritative intervention’ in the definition of censorship – so that it would refer not only to the direct (politically and ideologically motivated) restraints of communication acts but also to a variety of unfavourable circumstances that may avert individuals or groups from speaking, make them imitate or heed opinions of others, and say things other than they may say under more favourable conditions.”

(Splichal, 2006b: 111)

Second, Splichal argues that in terms of the media, censorship breeds alternative or underground forms of communication (ibid. 107); we might also look for and develop alternative educational institutions at the same time as we seek to reclaim critical space in mainstream education.

Third, there is room for change because public institutions are not closed systems and so there are external influences on each of the four quadrants of Splichal’s grid. The extent to which the education system can be influenced by external factors would be an interesting area for further research. Avis has written:

There is a need to draw together these educational struggles with others in wider society. This would allow the development of a counter hegemonic bloc or social movement aiming to transform the social formation towards social justice.

(Avis, 2007: 164)

Splichal too thinks there is a need to develop a new public social consciousness (which in turn would constitute the self and personal autonomy in different ways) to act as a balance to the totalising state and in the end appeals to a resuscitation of a kind of Kantian public reason or Habermasian mobilisation of public opinion.
3.4 Stage three

In this stage, participants were emailed with a copy of the presentation and analysis of results above and were simply asked whether they had any further comments to make, either in respect of critical pedagogy and neoliberalism or in respect of the analysis presented in the thesis. This stage further ensured validity and deepened the collaborative nature of the research.

Responses at this stage can be divided into four main categories:

1. Further comments on critical pedagogy;
2. Further comments on neoliberalism;
3. Comments on the thesis;

3.4.1 Further comments on critical pedagogy.

One participant in particular emailed back with comments which discussed in more depth his feelings about critical pedagogy. He was concerned about the possibility that critical pedagogy might be misused (in his opinion) to encourage an ‘anything goes’ approach in the classroom – he felt that it might on occasion tip over into an approach which maintained that all opinions and perspectives are equal. He felt that this approach was at the heart of a postmodern moral bankruptcy and that critical pedagogy itself needed to hold onto something much more robust. He said:

Critical pedagogy is providing the tools to look at the world and make judgments. Not have opinions – you have opinions about whether you like red cars or green cars, but to make judgments about what’s happening in the world and why it’s happening. A judgment is an opinion that’s backed up with some evidence.

In other words, critical pedagogy itself needs to be firmly rooted in the Enlightenment tradition of critique in search of truth backed up by evidence. ‘Opinions’ are not necessarily, or usually, worth discussing in the classroom; they belong properly on the private side of Splichal’s grid and are not the proper subject of academia. Opinions must be differentiated from judgments, and critical pedagogy can aid this process of differentiation. He went on to say:

We have this view that we have to give everyone’s opinion equal weight. This is not the case. You’re entitled to your own opinion, but it’s not a matter of public interest, is it? It might be interesting to you and your friends and family, but why should it be interesting to anyone else?
That is, the classroom is where one learns, through critique, to move away from individualistic opinions and towards a shared and public view of the world which is constantly subject to the checks of critical reason.

3.4.2 Further comments on neoliberalism

Since the participants had first been interviewed, the UK had experienced what many saw as an intensification of neoliberalism under the Coalition government. Funding to the public sector had been cut in successive ‘austerity budgets’, the poorest were being further immiserated through policies such as the notorious ‘bedroom tax’, and capital accumulation by the capitalist class had resulted in unprecedented public sector cuts (Jones, 2014).

In mainstream education, participants felt that things had got worse, if anything, since their interviews. One participant emailed to say that she felt education felt exactly like a business; teachers were increasingly required to market the business, thus transforming their subjects into products which had a high exchange value in terms of higher education and careers. She said:

We market a product, we deliver a product, we do customer satisfaction surveys constantly so that we can improve the product and attract more customers. That’s all our managers are interested in.

Another participant, a manager herself, talked in similar terms about her role. She said that it was becoming more and more difficult to support her colleagues in the ways she wanted. She wanted to help them to develop their ideas and teaching methods but she felt that her role was simply to ensure that the brand stayed competitive and that she spent hours analysing statistics from ‘competitor’ colleges. Other colleges were most definitely not seen as collaborators in the educational project – they were the competition, whose results had to be beaten. The same manager went on to say:

Marketing tactics are getting increasingly aggressive and hostile. So, ---- college put up a sign just down the road from us saying that their results were the best in the area. We went to their open evening and they were openly saying that our results were rubbish, but they were being incredibly selective, taking subjects that hadn’t done so well and ignoring others, that kind of thing. It’s not about the students or what’s best for them. It’s mad – it’s not as if we have shareholders!

I emailed her back and asked, given that there were no shareholders, where did she think the intense pressure to be competitive came from? This was her response:

I think it must be the government, ultimately. They constantly need us to demonstrate value for public money, and that seems to mean showing we’re doing a better job than other colleges. It can’t be value for public
money if we spend half our working life doing marketing and analysing statistics instead of teaching the kids.

In other words, this participant felt that the pressure to be competitive had originally come from a democratic impulse – the need to show that the public purse was being deployed wisely – but that the motivating impulse had then become simply the competition itself. Another participant had a slightly different view:

It’s so intensely pressurised now. It comes from the whole marketisation thing – that we constantly have to be competitive, we have to be like businesses and the free market will decide. It’s not about education at all. It’s about protecting the position of the rich and stopping the rest of us realising what’s going on.

### 3.4.3 Comments on the thesis

Of the eight who responded at this stage, every single participant commented that it was very helpful to realise that there were other teachers who had similar reactions and strategies. One said:

> I had been feeling, as you know, increasingly isolated and a bit demoralised. To say the least. It helps to know that it’s not just me. I did know that, of course. But it’s good to read what others have said.

Participants commented that they had found the Splichalilian theoretical analysis illuminating and helpful; one, for example, commented:

> It makes it clear how the current system has things backwards. It also helps to explain why and how that’s happened. Clarity is useful because when we know the shape of the problem, we can do something effective about it.

This participant subsequently asked for a copy of Splichal (2006b) to read and emailed again, saying how interesting he had found the descriptions of the impact of surveillance and enforced visibility. He said it helped him to make sense of why he felt so personally uncomfortable and agitated at work. On reading Splichal, he realised that he felt invaded by the wholesale state intervention into one’s self and that this, couple with an extreme lack of regard for proper public critique, was desperately difficult to tolerate.

Two respondents wanted to expand on what they had previously said about their influences and motivations; interestingly, both mentioned the impact of family life. This underlined the significance of having a life outside of education from which one can draw inspiration and a sense of connection, as well as alternative value systems. One referred to the impact his mother had had upon him in his childhood – she was from India and
had a useful way of encouraging him to look at things from different cultural points of view. The other said:

Teaching is just like parenting, I think. You want to give your children the most complete view of things and the best chances in life and you do that by encouraging them to think for themselves. You want them to have as many options open to them as possible.

Several participants wanted to know what the next stages would be – “What are you going to do with the thesis when it’s done?” asked one. I return to this question in the conclusion.

3.4.4 Suggestions for future solutions

Participants who responded were mostly keen to take things further. One comment was typical in suggesting that critical educators should unite:

I’m sure there’s a lot of people like us, who feel isolated in their own colleges but who could come together around a critical education project. Some of us will be dinosaurs – relics from a previous age! But there will be plenty of younger, newer teachers who would like to get involved too.

Three suggested that resources could be shared online and that critical educators could begin to develop a resource bank from which other teachers could borrow and adapt. They reiterated their views that they felt very time-pressured and said that a resource bank would help them to produce better resources and plan more thoroughly for critical lessons. Two of them said they would have liked to have read more examples of what other teachers were doing already.

Another, again, spoke of the help which could be garnered from teacher educators who could supply trainee teachers with examples of critical practice and an insistence on properly critical perspectives on the curriculum. Of course, many teacher educators are well aware of this need and are themselves frustrated by working within the limits of a system which does not allow them to educate teachers as they would wish and in which:

teachers are now being trained as an integral part of an educational structure which is complicit in class and labour (re) production, a position which is clearly in conflict with notions of social justice.

(Atkins, 2011:4)

We do have examples, nonetheless, of other approaches to teacher education (eg Hill, 2007a), and there would be considerable value in going back to these as a starting point for the education of new generations of FE teachers.
3.5 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, a presentation of categories led to the insight that teachers’ concerns about the impact of neoliberalism is frequently connected with a sense that critical thought and powerful knowledge are being suppressed and downgraded because of the visibility given to outcomes and systems. They deplored the loss of autonomy and the intensification of labour and they wanted more support from management and from teacher educators. The deployment of a Splichalian analytic approach clarifies why teachers feel uneasy in a system which has, effectively, flipped the Enlightenment project on its head.
Chapter four: conclusion

4.1 Outline of the chapter

This chapter is divided into three main sections:

1. Theoretical conclusions
2. Practical outcomes
3. Reflections and suggestions for further research

4.2 Theoretical conclusions

Splichal’s work in communications theory – notably, his analysis of the production and selection of knowledge and the effects of surveillance - has considerable explanatory power when transferred to critical education studies. His discussion of how public discourses shape private spaces can illuminate how technologies of surveillance and control within a technicist education system constitute the self and what we can know in particular ways which all but preclude other ways of being and knowing and which render hegemonic the dominant neoliberal worldview. Surveillance and quantification extend the state’s agenda into the classroom and into the private spaces of the self, so that even these become public property, forced to the edges and subject to scrutiny. This centrifugal impetus, where everything is forced to the outside, everything is on show, is the opposite to the centripetal impetus of scholarly reflection – the centring-down into the depths, the impulse to reject the quick and the soundbite in favour of longer-fermented insights and connections.

The ensuing symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1991) as the structures of state control impact on education and on individual cognition is all the more powerful for two reasons. First, when surveillance is extended into classrooms and into private space, then options are limited: one can exist in a state of perpetual and exhausting mental retreat and resistance; one can take part in revolutionary action or one can find the relief in learning to love big brother. Second, the rhetoric surrounding exposure borrows heavily from the language and ideology of radical praxis – if we are against secrecy, then we will be for public scrutiny; if we are in favour of collective action for social transformation, then we will be in favour of ‘social learning’ and active and visible participation. Any tendency to want to sit in a private corner and be quiet is a bit suspicious. The language of radical praxis has, of course, been taken over by the capitalist hegemony in the interests of creating a neutered and self-surveilling labour force. What is more, it is a labour force with a diminishing likelihood of even imagining alternative discourses.
Although Splichal’s field is first and foremost communications theory and the media in particular, what he says is clearly relevant to any form of ideological state apparatus. It clarifies a number of issues very usefully:

1) Focusing the light on some issues casts others into darkness. What is constituted as a spectacle, or what is deemed worth measuring, implies that other things are less valuable;

2) What is made visible in public life can result in both an invasion of privacy and a repression of nonconformist ideas;

3) Those things which are currently rendered visible in education and those things which are rendered invisible are in fact the opposite of those which would have been rendered visible/invisible under classical liberal democracies;

4) Different disciplinary technologies (such as assessed reflection) function as gatekeepers and pivots to ensure that hegemonic views remain so;

5) By moving those technologies along the two axes or indeed by reversing those technologies, one could develop a systematic critical approach towards neoliberal hegemony which could operate not just within education but also, potentially, within the media and other forms of ideological state apparatus.

Any hegemonic view will, of course, shine light on some things and cast shade upon others. It is clear from the interviews with post-16 teachers that their views of what is wrong with the neoliberal impact upon education, and the solution to the problem, can be described very much in terms of darkness and light, of secrecy and openness, of keeping hidden and disclosing.

With what, then, do we replace the apparent instrumentalism and utilitarianism, the culture of surveillance and control where teachers are depersonalised and students are recast as consumers? After all, do we really want a return to the status quo ante? To which period of education would we return? The (in some ways, educationally) more liberal sixties and seventies might have opened up avenues for creativity and free expression; but creativity and free expression are not enough if we wish to change society and work for social justice. The tripartite system resulted in a classed education system where secondary moderns were populated by the working classes, grammar schools by budding professionals from the lower middle classes and fee-paying schools by the capitalist classes (the third element of state schooling, technical schools, never really gained a foothold in pre-16 education).
I suggest that the only educational approach which will suffice as a way forward is the development of critical pedagogy in all of our schools. Critical pedagogy is a method of casting more lights upon what we think we know, of testing received wisdom and opinion, of enquiring after a (constantly elusive) truth. The fact that the ‘truth’ is elusive no more invalidates the search for more accurate knowledge than it invalidates, says, scientific method:

For Kant, a “public use of reason” also denotes provision of reasons for one’s judgment. Individual judgments have to be publicly presented and discussed to become more rational or objectively certain, and eventually agreed upon. In fact, no opinion is merely an arbitrary fiction, and it must always be presented and taken up with some knowledge. Although opinions should have no place in the sphere of science and morals where knowledge ought to dominate, according to Kant, the entire development of scientific knowledge is nothing but enduring refutation of erroneous hypotheses and partial explanations. Thus, if the “obsession” with a permanent revelation of the hidden delegitimized the noble idea of the public (sphere), the “obsession” with errors and inaccuracies would delegitimize science.

(Splichal 2006b:110)

Critical pedagogy has an inbuilt critique of power relationships, since power skews knowledge in the direction of its own interests and can obliterate other perspectives, as we see from Splichal’s analytic grid. Critical pedagogy constantly forces a distance between power and knowledge, by unearthing and bringing to light new perspectives. It is worth recalling the words of one of the participants quoted earlier in the thesis:

It’s like in a different room with a number of lights around. The light which you put on throws a different kind of shadow, and once you click on another light, the shadow becomes different again. The first shadow doesn’t vanish, but it changes. What we are trying to do in critical pedagogy is click on some more lights and then have a look and think – tell me what you see now.

It does this, however, without the ‘Habermasochistic’ exposure of those who would prefer a private life, if coupled with the Enlightenment conception that critical reason is the correct way to proceed in public; opinions and beliefs are private and personal. There is no place within public education for confession, and schooling is not therapy (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008). Of course repressed voices need to be heard. But Splichal makes it clear that when what is heard is structured by those in power and the agenda for what is worth hearing is set by those with a vested interest in the status quo, then the exposure of minority voices can be extremely risky rather than empowering. A reinvigorated public sphere in which marginalised voices are heard needs to take into account the dangers of exposing marginalised voices to surveillance in a Europe dominated by capital interests and the neoliberal hegemony. Splichal’s analysis precisely
shows how power relations in the public sphere have become distorted by consumerist capitalism, and what we need to do about it if critical discourse is to be renewed. In terms of education, if we follow Habermas, the result is exposure to hostile forces of neoliberal surveillance. If we follow Splichal, we see that the issue is first of all structural – if we put the structure of culture right, we can then join forces as a counter-hegemonic bloc in the public sphere through the use of critical reason.

Splichal’s analysis rests upon foundations in the writings of Kant and Bentham, as well as upon more recent theorists such as Habermas. His epistemological emphasis upon critical reason serves as a rebuttal to the excesses of postmodernism; his analytic grid shows why we need to distance ourselves from ‘touchy-feeliness’ and therapeutic approaches in education. A Splichalian analysis illustrates why therapeutic approaches actually disempower those whom they are meant to empower. Marginalised groups are empowered by having access to rigorous knowledge. Students need to know things before they can have opinions about them, and their opinions need to be rational and well-founded if they are to count in public (including in the classroom). Contemporary society gives priority to public emotion and is suspicious of public reason, a back-to-front approach which needs to be reversed so that emotion is properly back where it belongs – in private life and in the arts. A Splichalian approach underlines the need to get away from celebrity culture and from confessional culture, both of which are the new, improved opium of the masses. Those in power must be delighted that the marginalized have been so easily distracted from public critical reasoning. It is the task of critical educators to show students that the radical alternative is most definitely not to switch off and play computer games or follow celebrities: the radical alternative is to engage in hard, consistent enquiry and academic study. In schools, we need to be able to equip our young people to become active citizens and move away from the superficial. What Splichal writes is fundamental to this. A return to Kant resuscitates the question: do we want a public sphere dominated by the incontinent emotional outpourings of ill-informed and half-educated people, or do we want people to engage in rational discourse about how we put together our public life?

To return to Michael Young - what is needed is an approach that:

- treats knowledge as external to learners (and also) recognizes that this externality is not given, but has a social and historical basis

(Young, 2014: 92)

We saw that critical pedagogy had been criticized both for not being flexible enough and for insisting on the role of critical reason (Ellsworth, 1989) and for being too flexible and empty of real knowledge (Young, 2014). The latter is not so surprising since, as we have
seen, recuperated interpretations of critical approaches evacuate them of any potential either to educate or liberate. The former rests on an assumption that critical reason is embedded in what Young refers to as ‘Future 1’ knowledge (*ibid.* 59-60). In fact, it isn’t. Future 1 approaches are not critical, though they do assume that knowledge is external. However, they make the unwarranted assumption that knowledge is fixed and undisputed, not reflective of dominant power interests. When knowledge is treated like this, education remains instrumental and students are excluded from an active engagement with education, as Avis pointed out:

Instrumentalism serves to undermine the critical potential that flows from a serious engagement with academic knowledge. Another consequence of student instrumentalism is that academic, vocational and practical knowledge becomes frozen. This is because the social interests, conflicts and practices that have led to the generation of knowledge are obscured.

(Avis, 1991:285)

Ellsworth is quite right to say that this approach to schooling is not empowering. Young, on the other hand, demonstrates that ‘Future 3’ knowledge, based upon the understanding that there *is* powerful knowledge and that teaching this to students *is* the route to increasing their life chance, recognises that such knowledge is open to question and refinement and improvement. In other words, though he does not make the connection, it is open to the processes of critical enquiry, properly rooted in Kant and the Enlightenment (and in Plato beyond that). Habermas (1997) and others (such as Pagden, 2013) have reminded us that the Enlightenment project is incomplete. There is an urgent need in education for a return to the principles of critical enquiry and public discourse espoused by the Enlightenment and then abandoned during the 1990s race for the postmodern bottom. As Young says, however, we do not need a return to the *status quo ante* of Future 1 knowledge- perhaps the temporary triumph of postmodernism can at least partly be attributed to the fact that Future 1 had lost its critical bearings and become ossified and embedded in powerful interests. What is needed is a Spichalian awareness that dominant knowledge is that of the powerful and that it does have disciplinary effects on the relatively powerless; we therefore need to use the tools of critical enquiry to expose the power-knowledge binary and to move us closer to ‘powerful knowledge’. 
A genealogical outline of this process might look like this:

**Table 6: knowledge, power, education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>period</th>
<th>knowledge</th>
<th>power</th>
<th>education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Enlightenment</td>
<td>Powerful interests (religion, wealth) dictate what counts as knowledge, in their own interests</td>
<td>Not much room for social justice; intensely hierarchical and undemocratic</td>
<td>Most schools and universities are for the wealthy and powerful, controlled by the church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlightenment and modernity</td>
<td>Rational critical enquiry dictates what counts as knowledge, in the interests of democracy, truth and justice</td>
<td>Initially, not aimed at the working classes; eventually, underpins radical movements and perspectives such as Marxism</td>
<td>Beginnings of idea that all should be educated; 20th century- state education for all; working class education movements such as WEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ossification of modernity</td>
<td>Knowledge is equated with the ‘canon’ and is seen as static and neutral</td>
<td>Power actors try to maintain their position by ensuring that familiarity with canonical knowledge is an arbiter of privilege (e.g. the 11 plus tested ‘middle class’ Eurocentric knowledge)</td>
<td>State education legitimizes and reproduces class system, whether through tripartite system or setting and streaming in comprehensives. Rise of technical FE colleges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodernity (originally from a progressive, social justice perspective)</td>
<td>There is no truth or knowledge as such and everything counts equally; canonical knowledge is no better than, and</td>
<td>Initially, an attempt to raise the status of subaltern culture and to undermine powerful interests</td>
<td>Development of courses in ‘Women’s Studies’, ‘Postcolonial Studies’ etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

118
often represses, 
knowledge produced 
by subaltern 
communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postmodernity (seguing into a helpless, fragmented individualism that serves capitalist interests)</th>
<th>There is no real need for ‘knowledge’ (at least, not for the working class): skills are in any case what count and this is what will help the working classes</th>
<th>Plays into the New Right agenda: working classes consent to the hegemony and are funneled into working class jobs and prevented from seeing the whole picture</th>
<th>Quasi-markets in education: academies, league tables, parentocracy, free schools. WEA subjected to Ofsted and denatured.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reinvigoration of Enlightenment approaches (including Marxism) but with an added critical appreciation of the pitfalls posed by the fact that ideological state apparatuses serve the interests of the powerful</td>
<td>There is external, powerful knowledge, but not necessarily a static canon. Knowledge is refined and improved by using critical reason.</td>
<td>A progressive or revolutionary approach. Teaching powerful knowledge enables working class students to increase their life chances and removes false consciousness.</td>
<td>Future 3 schools?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A critical approach implies change in the direction of social justice (rather than, say, the directionless and morally vacuous change of postmodern approaches). Further, it requires that students are exposed to ‘powerful knowledge’ rather than simply opinions. Powerful knowledge has great explanatory power; abstract mathematics explains more than functional numeracy. If our aim as educators is to equip students with as much of the truth (however qualified, however partial) as we can in order that they may know when they are being sold half a story, then we need to teach our students in each
discipline those things which experts have agreed are important to know. This precisely does not place the ‘canon’ beyond criticism – it opens it up to rational critique. Critical pedagogy encourages students to reflect and to question the writings of our greatest thinkers and artists and scientists – and to seek more knowledge from other cultures and perspectives too. Knowing the ‘western canon’ and knowing about other cultures are certainly not mutually exclusive. We will find, if we do, that the notions of contingency, paradigm shift, approximation and progress (dialectics is nothing if not progressive) are absorbed by students.

It is crucial that students are not restricted to the kind of instrumental knowledge neoliberalism would have them study. In Apple’s words, this would be “intellectual suicide” on the part of would-be progressive educators. (Apple, 2013:42) Certainly, our students will need to earn a living. But we need to bear in mind that at Eton, nobody sits a GNVQ. Embedded, contextualised knowledge simply does not shine as many lights.

Critical educators need, then, to focus upon that which is properly in the realm of public education – subject knowledge - and place this firmly in the upper right quadrant of the analytic grid. Shine light upon Pythagoras, Plato and Kant, upon Austen and Wollstonecraft, upon Marx and Arendt, upon Avicenna and Averroes. Then, the aspect of the individual which is drawn into the light is that aspect which uses critical reason to relate to well-winnowed ideas and which can, after a careful critique of these ideas and only then) begin to winnow ideas of its own. There is no use whatsoever in starting where the student is, if where the student is is mired in false consciousness. Start where Shakespeare, or Ramanuja, or Kahlo, or Einstein are, and treat those ideas with critical reason. In this, I am in agreement with Young’s summary of the purpose of education:

It is to enable all students to acquire knowledge that takes them beyond their experience. It is knowledge that many will not have access to at home, among their friends, or in the communities in which they live. As such, access to this knowledge is the ‘right’ of all pupils as future citizens.

(Young, 2014: 10)

Young is, in fact, in complete agreement with the Freirean approach to critical pedagogy here; Freire wrote:

In overromanticizing students’ language so as to discourage them from acquiring multiple discourses, including the ‘standard’ discourse of the dominant society in which they live, teachers run the risk of becoming entrapped in a ‘feel good’ pedagogy that passes as progressive. If they do this, teachers are not engaging with their students in a mutual process of liberation.

(Freire, 1997: 305-306; see also Avis, 1991)
If teachers proceed by reversing the structural censorship described by Splichal, then they will shine the light of reason on powerful knowledge, and the personal will remain just that – personal, in the bottom left quadrant of Splichal’s grid. What will then be rendered invisible in the classroom will not be critique and rationality, but rather ungrounded opinion, egotism, superficiality and an obsession with the emotional, confessional and therapeutic.

This is hard intellectual work and hard pedagogical work, but it is what critical teachers know they should be doing. The student is thereby reconstituted as a scholar, an enquirer, one who is empowered by intellectual riches which can never be taken away.

**4.3 Practical outcomes**

Critical research should have practical consequences as well as theoretical insights, otherwise it remains ‘comfort radicalism’:

> There are portions of the literature in critical pedagogy that may also represent elements of conversion strategies by new middle class actors who are seeking to care out paths of mobility within the academy... [such academics] wish to portray themselves as politically engaged; but almost all of their political engagement is textual.

(Apple, 2013:40)

There are two main, interlinked, practical consequences of this thesis. First, several of the participants mentioned that they would be greatly helped in developing and sustaining their practice of critical pedagogy if their sense of isolation could be reduced by the formation of a group of critical educators in Further Education. As a result, we are now forming such a group in the north of England. Membership has started with four of the original participants in the thesis and termly meetings are planned for the academic year 2015-2016, where members can compare experiences, ideas and approaches and reap the benefits of collaborative practice. We hope to write collaboratively about our experiences and, in 2017, to host a conference where our ideas about critical pedagogy can be disseminated more broadly.

Meanwhile, the group is developing a Virtual Learning Environment as a resource bank for critical educators. Here, we can freely share resources, lesson plans, schemes of work and ideas. Again, we hope to be able to publish some of our resources and lesson plans as a help to other teachers in the sector who are interested in trying to teach critically; we hope these may be of particular help and interest to younger teachers and

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16 The schedule for the coming academic year is: Autumn term: Sharing good practice in critical pedagogy; Spring term: Management strategies to support critical perspectives in 16-19 education; Summer term: The role of teacher education. In this last respect, our group is reading Hill (2007a) in preparation.
trainee teachers, who may not themselves have experienced much critical pedagogy when at school, since most will have been educated post-1988 Education Reform Act. We hope in this way to develop sustainable ways of developing and keeping alive critical pedagogy in our colleges.

The final practical outcome of undertaking this thesis is that I have helped to set up a new sixth form college along the educational lines advocated in the thesis. Before explaining a little more about this new college, I would like to quote from an interview with a participant who had left the profession altogether because of his disillusionment. The extract records a conversation between me and the participant as the interview was coming to an end (P= participant; RC= me):

P: I don’t think I’ll come back into teaching. I’m over 60 now anyway, and I quite enjoy what I’m doing. I know that’s not the point, exactly, but I think I’m actually of help to people. I know that that in itself is not a political thing, but I don’t think it’s possible to make a wider difference in state education any longer.

RC: Would you come back in if we set up a critical free school? (Laughter)

P: Well, in that case, if you could set up a free school (laughter) ... if you, me, one or two other people could set up a thing like that, which is outside the system, that ... yes, I would.

RC: So all the people that I’m interviewing for my thesis, they can be the teachers! (Laughter)

P: They can be employed by you! (Laughter) You see, you just want power; you want to run the school!

RC: I know! (Laughter)

Of course, at the time, we were joking: we both were extremely sceptical about free schools and the ideology of marketisation underpinning them. Earlier in the same interview, this participant had talked about:

the so-called ‘free schools’ that they’re trying to introduce at the moment. You know, in what sense are they free? Well, they’re free of local authority control, in other words, they’re free of democratic control. I think they’re still basically going to be ruled by Ofsted guidelines and by league tables. So in what sense are they free? And of course, oh yes, they’re free to bring business in. (Laughter)

The laughter here was quite hollow, of course. I had certainly not thought of setting up a school and that had never been an intended consequence of writing a thesis. However, the more I reflected upon the conversation, the more it made me smile for another reason. What if the free school policy could be used to set up something a bit different

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17 It is worth noting, perhaps, that of course Local Authority control of education does not necessarily mean democratic control (see, for example, Education Group II, 1991:42, and Manton, 2001).
from the expectations of the right wing ideologues behind the free school programme? Free schools are schools which are able to choose their own curriculum, which can employ their own teachers and set their own contracts, which have their own vision and ethos and which can employ their own teaching methods. What if someone were to use these freedoms to try to escape from the neoliberal grasp of most state-funded schools and do something critical? Could it be done?

Such a school might espouse critical values through and through. It could provide the managerial and leadership support needed for its teachers to feel able to deploy critical pedagogy openly and consistently. And it could provide the kind of powerful education that transforms life chances for young people who might not otherwise have access to them.

I got the chance to find out a few months later, when I began to collaborate with two colleagues to set up a new free sixth form in a deprived area of North Sheffield (I am now the school’s first headteacher). We spent a year planning every aspect of a school which would, we hoped, provide powerful knowledge to young people in an area where there was no current good academic provision for 16-19 year olds. Young people in Chapeltown who wanted to access an academic education post-16 were typically taking two buses to get to sixth forms in the more affluent south of the city; this journey took them around an hour each way. Middle class families were able to afford homes in the south of the city near the good schools, or to send their children to fee-paying schools. We felt very strongly (as did local parents and young people) that this was unfair and that the less affluent young people in the north of the city deserved the same kind of education that their wealthier peers could buy. There is good vocational education for young people in the north of the city, but we felt that students should have the choice of an academic post-16 education if that was what they wanted. Our vision was that we would create a state-funded school which empowered local young people to transform their lives through an academic education, which would give them access to the best universities and most powerful professions and which would enable them to develop for themselves a critical awareness of the power processes at play in society and their own position in relation to those processes and vested interests.

Our school is called Chapeltown Academy and we opened in September 2014 with 56 local sixteen year-old students, all of whom (and their parents) were inspired by our vision and ethos. Ten months later, we have almost twice as many applicants as places

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18 Interestingly, we had a disagreement with our local Labour MP about this. She told us that she felt that the area needed more ‘level three engineers’, not more young people who would go off to university. I felt that this was a prime example of the kind of thinking on the left which can seem indistinguishable from those New Right policy-makers who want working class children to be educated for working class jobs.
for the next academic year. I have tried, as far as possible, to heed the concerns and ideas of the participants in this thesis and I have tried to make it a school where managers:

conceive of themselves as enablers who strive to support and create conditions favourable to a radical educational project.

(Avis, 1991:289)

Some of the distinctive features of the college include:

1. The curriculum is based upon powerful knowledge and not skills / competences / vocational courses; the curriculum is A level only and, in fact, mostly facilitating subjects.\(^\text{19}\) The school has three faculties: Science and Mathematics (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Maths, Further Maths, Computer Science and Psychology); Social Sciences and Humanities (Politics, Economics, Geography, History, Philosophy/ Religious Studies); and Languages and Literature (French, German, Spanish, English Literature and English Language).

2. Class sizes are very small and will remain so, in order that students benefit from a great deal of teacher attention and teachers are not overloaded with marking.

3. We aim always to prioritise educational choices over budgetary ones whenever possible (within quite severe financial constraints – we have no multi-academy trust or City backers or fee-paying schools behind us). This means that, as long as one student wants to take a subject, we will run classes in that subject. There is no minimum ‘customer’ number. At present, for example, our German class runs with only two students. This offers students some security in their academic choices and it offers teachers security in their jobs.\(^\text{20}\)

4. Being guided by educational motives rather than financial ones means we are poor but it means we can provide the right education for each student. For instance, some students need three years to progress through their A levels, perhaps because they chose the wrong set of subjects initially, or because they have suffered severe family difficulties or illness. Recent cuts to sector funding have meant that most colleges will no longer allow students to take an extra year, since students in their third year do not attract full funding. At Chapeltown

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\(^\text{19}\) Facilitating subjects are those described by the Russell Group of universities as those which are most useful as preparation for undergraduate study in academic subjects.

\(^\text{20}\) This means I have to make hard budgetary decisions away from the classroom. Senior management salaries are low; we have no administrative support for senior managers; we employ our own students to cover reception; we have no playing fields or minibus. But we have set up a badminton court in a warehouse, staff have contributed their own books to the school library, our students are gaining valuable work experience and we hire a minibus by the day and drive it ourselves if we really need one.
Academy, students may certainly take three years if this is best for them in educational terms.

5. We have no one-size-fits-all ethos at all. Some students are taking two subjects at AS; some three; most take four; a couple take five. If a student wants to study a language which we don’t teach as part of the academic curriculum, then we will run it as an extra-curricular option (this year, Italian and Japanese; next year, Arabic). If a student has Asperger’s syndrome and needs a quiet space, then that’s what we provide.

6. Students take an extra-curricular course on ‘The History of Ideas’, which aims to contextualise disciplinary knowledge by showing how ideas have developed over time, how they are influenced by power and wealth and how disciplines cross-fertilise and do not exist in deracinated, abstract silos. The course draws upon philosophy, religious studies, history, art, politics, geography, music, science, mathematics and economics and thus helps to ensure that the students can not only locate their own academic interests in context but that they retain a broad, powerful academic education as long as possible.

7. The professional development programme for teachers includes sessions on critical pedagogy. We share ideas and resources and explore how to approach different topics and aspects of specifications in critical ways.

8. Given my background as a union representative, I was determined to employ teachers and administrative staff on better terms and conditions than those negotiated, for example, between the Sixth Form College Association and the teaching unions; thus, for example, teachers at the school are all paid slightly more than they would be elsewhere for slightly fewer hours than average. The caretaker is paid as much as a teacher and has considerable autonomy and responsibility.

9. I try hard to protect teachers’ autonomy by giving them as much choice as possible over the specification, enabling them to work from home when possible, giving time for further academic study, ensuring that each teacher has their own classroom base which they can equip as they think best for their subject, and being as consultative as possible about developments within the school.

10. The staff structure within the school is relatively ‘flat’, in that most teachers have some kind of cross-college management responsibility and senior managers (including me) are also teachers. For example, the mathematics teacher is responsible for data management across the school; the politics teacher leads on equality and diversity; the Economics teacher manages the extra-curricular programme and so forth. Salary structures are also relatively flat and I do not
earn a great deal more than teachers. This helps to ensure that teachers feel they 'own' the school and have real power within the institution.

11. We encourage collaborative teaching initiatives. For instance, the specifications in Religious Studies and Biology both include genetic engineering. One of the Biology teachers has a doctorate and industrial experience in this area, so she teaches the scientific aspects of the topic and I teach the ethical approaches. Our (liberal) Economics teacher invites me into classes to talk about Marxism; when I reach the part of the A2 specification in Religious Studies on Business Ethics, I will return the favour by hosting a 'panel show' where students can quiz both of us on our (very different) views of the ethics of capitalism. Collaboration such as this enables us to shine as many lights as possible on different areas of the curriculum. It also shows the students that the search for knowledge is a process and that it is the search for truth that matters.

12. This idea that academic pursuits are a great pleasure in their own right rather than simply a means to an end is crucial at our school. This idea frequently forms the central theme of open events and assemblies. Staff are all engaged in academic activities of their own and students see that many of us choose to spend our spare time in further study or scholarship; the excitement which this generates is incredibly motivating for our students, many of whom express a huge sense of relief that they are finally somewhere where they are not teased for enjoying studying.

13. We are deliberately open with our time and resources so that we can encourage an ethic of collaboration rather than competition with other schools and colleges. For instance, we support the small sixth form in a local school by giving their students access to our classes, library and Higher Education programme. Similarly, we are cultivating relationships with schools which provide subjects we cannot teach but would like to provide, such as music. We also provide free one-to-one and group GCSE classes after school to year 11 students in local schools who feel they want to be in a small, academic, family atmosphere but who are struggling with their GCSEs. In these ways, we can share funding, resources, good will and expertise – and perhaps create some interesting challenges to league tables by sharing students and teachers.

14. Parents are welcome to use our library and other facilities and to join in with some of the extra-curricular courses; other members of the community also join us for extra-curricular courses (for instance, the local newspaper editor is learning Japanese alongside a group of students who are going on a school trip to Tokyo next year). Of our 56 students, not one single student has a parent who has graduated from university (though one parent is currently studying for a degree
at the University of Huddersfield). These parents want to help their children to achieve as much as possible, but they do not have the cultural capital needed to do it. We include them as much as possible in the life of the school and we give them as much information as possible about what their children are doing and what they need to do to increase their chances of getting into a good university.

15. The school has extended opening hours: we open at 7am and close at 9pm. During these hours, students have access to the library (which is furnished with sofas and rugs so that they can curl up with a book), classrooms and computers and there are always staff around to help if need be. We also have a dining kitchen where staff, students and parents can make breakfast, lunch or an evening meal together and eat alongside one another, and a common room furnished with comfortable sofas and a piano. One student recently said, “It’s like being part of one big, rather studious family.” Many of our students do not have their own room at home and many come from homes where there are no books, or where there are noisy younger siblings in a confined space, or where there is nobody available to help with homework. This is not because their parents are not interested. It is because their parents cannot afford a large house or books, or are immigrants who do not speak English and do not understand the education system, or are ill or working shifts. Our school gives students an opportunity to study in a warm, welcoming, family environment where they know they will have resources and help and interested adults who have the time to show an interest in their ideas.

4.4 Reflections and suggestions for further research and praxis

4.4.1 The potential of Splichal’s analysis

A Splichalian approach has value both in terms of explaining structural censorship in both the media and in education and it would be interesting to extend this approach more widely in terms of cultural critique, not least because this method can suggest solutions as well as diagnose problems. The Enlightenment project was derailed by the rise and intensification of consumerism and capitalism so that free-floating, rational public critique can no longer operate (if it ever could) in power-neutral conditions. This thesis suggests that this is not an insurmountable problem since it is critical reason itself which can be used to address the issues of power which surround it; rather than abandon the critical project, then, we need to intensify it and redouble our efforts to claim back the public ground of rational discourse. This entails a robust opposition to consumerism, objectification, superficiality, exposure, surveillance of workers,
postmodernism and celebrity culture, since all of these cultural features are the products of the centrifugal forces of hegemonic neoliberalism. Feelings, opinions (insofar as they are uninformed) and the personal life properly belong in the private realm, where they are not subject to public scrutiny. A Splichal analysis of contemporary culture and society would perhaps look like this:

**Fig. 3: analytic grid: culture and society**

Where once it perhaps felt subversive and transgressive to bring the personal and the private into the public realm, nowadays nothing could be more banal, more conformist, more suitable to the maintenance of the neoliberal hegemony. What would actually be transgressive and radical these days would be an insistent public resurgence of the rational self and a refusal to disclose and objectify the person and private. Here, critical educators can teach their students that there is more to life than the joyless parade of the soulless. Critical educators need to equip their students with the ability to resist the endless centrifugal force towards superficiality which is the opposite to the centripetal force, the spiraling inwards required by profundity of thought and action.

Splichal’s analysis points us in the direction of revolutionary and/or transformative action using a common approach across a range of cultural sites in a counter-hegemonic bloc. The teacher as organic intellectual can collaborate to build this approach in webs of activism across the bloc, since:

education has been and is a truly powerful arena for building coalitions and movements, one whose social effects can echo throughout the society. In essence, they are central both to creating lasting mobilizations
4.4.2 Case studies rather than thematic analysis

As noted in the discussion of methods, some integrity was sacrificed to ethical concerns in the decision to use cross-case thematic analysis rather than a case study approach. Much detail of biographic and narrative interest was lost as a result, which was regrettable. It would be interesting to undertake further research into the experiences of people of this generation (born in the 1940s and 1950s) who went into education, or other public service jobs, as (often left wing) idealists in the 1970s and who became either disillusioned or increasingly combative and radical as the decades progressed. What can that experience have been like as the parabola of a life? The years since the recent global financial crisis have seen a renewed interest in critical approaches and political activism as more and more people have become aware of the neoliberal intensification of capital accumulation; the experiences and insights of those who had hopes for social justice and a transformed society in the second half of the twentieth century can help provide impetus and insight for those interested in social justice.

4.4.3 Schooling

As my school approaches the end of its first year in operation, I am reflecting on the interesting times we have been through. The free schools agenda undoubtedly has its roots in the neoliberal desire to turn education into a quasi-market; however, the state school system in general operates under conditions of neoliberalism. Free schools offer some freedom in the area of curriculum design, staffing, ethos and goals. These freedoms have been used in less than helpful ways in some schools but they are freedoms which can be harnessed by critical educators in the interests of social justice. A flat organisational structure, small class sizes, doors open twelve hours a day or more, a curriculum based upon powerful knowledge, individual program structures, empowering extra-curricular activities, support for critical pedagogy, autonomy for teachers, collaboration, openness to the community and extended opening hours – all of these features make for a radical community school in this materially deprived community on the borders between Sheffield and Barnsley, and it is a transferable model. Further work needs to be done to extend this and similar models of schooling whilst we still have the freedom to set them up.
Over the next year, I will be undertaking collaborative research with colleagues in the school into the experiences of those involved (teachers, parents, students, managers), in the hope that this might be useful for others who want to set up similar schools. Those who have come to us in our first year have been brave and pioneering people who believe in and are prepared to take considerable personal risks for social justice. It would be instructive to capture something of their motives, hopes, fears and practices at this liminal time.

**4.4.4 The sociology of knowledge**

A growing number of educators on the left (of whom perhaps the most notable is Young, 2013) has drawn attention to the anti-educative slant of vocational education that prepares young people for their role as relatively docile workers in the neoliberal economy. As has already been noted, this can only seem like a “bloody good idea” to the New Right! This thesis concurs with Young that social justice is best served by providing an education based upon ‘powerful knowledge’; the thesis moves on from Young by suggesting that the pedagogy required to deliver powerful knowledge is actually critical pedagogy. Powerful knowledge has its roots in Enlightenment epistemologies and ontologies; so does critical reason. Indeed, a curriculum based on powerful knowledge and a pedagogy based on critical dialectical enquiry are two sides of the same coin, which, if spent in enough schools, will empower our students. Further research in the sociology of knowledge to illuminate the relationship here between curriculum and pedagogy would be helpful to provide firm theoretical foundations for this approach in schools.

**4.4.5 Extension of critical pedagogy group**

In order to promote further collaboration, as befits critical research, the conference planned by the critical pedagogy group for 2017 (and hosted at my school) will help to disseminate critical ideas and practices. I hope it will also attract further critical educators in schools, colleges, universities, unions and elsewhere who may wish to join with us in planning critical education initiatives in a variety of directions – more schools, more research and more professional development initiatives. Above all, I hope we can develop more links with others, in education and elsewhere, working against the nihilistic, utilitarian, commodifying, shallow forces of neoliberalism, and for social justice, powerful knowledge, depth, the publicity of reason, cooperation and the ‘subjectification’ or rehumanisation of the individual.
4.5 Chapter conclusion

Denzin and Lincoln have said that critical approaches should be, “evaluated in terms of their emancipatory implications” (2003: 35). This chapter has delineated some of the ways in which the findings of the thesis might be deployed more extensively in the pursuit of social justice and emancipation.

The chapter indicates how Splichal’s analytic framework might be extended beyond education and used to consider other features of neoliberal culture; by doing this, the sense of an incomplete Enlightenment project is deepened. Just as Keith Joseph found Marxists the right way up and turned them on their heads, so neoliberalism found the Enlightenment the right way up and turned it on its head. A reversal around the vertical axis of Splichal’s grid is required if we are to resuscitate the possibility of creating a rational critical public life and returning the personal to the private realm. In returning to the Enlightenment, we should do so in a critical way; this can be reflected in schools which teach their students about powerful knowledge and about how it is constructed and how it can be critiqued. The return to the Enlightenment must be done with an awareness of the censoring effects of hegemonic neoliberalism and the dangers of exposure in a hostile environment. This underlines the importance of acting in concert with others in a counter-hegemonic bloc that criticizes the dominant culture on a range of fronts. Educators can be central actors in such a bloc if they take the opportunities now available to set up new, critical schools, collaborative initiatives and links with workers in other fields. In this, we can learn from the insights and experiences of those who were radicalized during les trente glorieuses and who have lived through dispiriting and embattled times since: new critical educators can bring renewed energy and hope, and together, we can continue to do the work which will transform our society into one which is just, fair and open, where as many lights as possible are encouraged to shine.


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Appendix 1: Participant information sheet

I would like to invite you to be a participant in my doctoral research entitled, ‘Critical classrooms: how teachers in Further Education engage in critical pedagogy within a neoliberal policy environment’. This research is for the degree of Ed.D. at the University of Huddersfield; my supervisor is Professor James Avis who can be contacted at j.avis@hud.ac.uk. It is also possible that my doctoral research will be used as the basis for papers submitted to academic journals.

My research focuses on critical pedagogy in the context of a neoliberal policy environment in English Further Education. I would particularly like to find out about pedagogy which promotes critical approaches to the neoliberal hegemony.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and, if you agree to participate, you have the right to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason. I am using a purposive sample for my research and have approached you because I believe that you have an interest in critical pedagogy.

The research process will be as follows:

1. I will send participants this Participant Information Sheet. It contains details of the project and a list of possible questions to be covered in a semi-structured interview to be arranged at a later date. This initial information gives the participant an opportunity to think over responses ahead of the interview and reflects my view that a period of reflection and deliberation on the part of participants is more likely to result in valid information than would a totally spontaneous interview. This is partly because the concepts I am investigating are complex and I would like to give participants the opportunity to consider their responses in some depth before interviews.

2. I will arrange a convenient time to interview each participant and I anticipate that each interview will last no longer than one hour. This will be in a place of your choosing. You may prefer not to have the interview at your place of work and if this is the case then I can provide an interview room at Craven College and will cover your travel expenses to Skipton. If you prefer to be interviewed at your place of work or other location near to you, then I can travel to you.
3. Interviews will be recorded with a Flip camera. Transcripts will be anonymised and every effort will be made to protect your identity. The interview will be confidential and transcripts will only be used for research purposes.

4. I intend to code interview transcripts and analyse thematically. After my initial analysis of the interview, participants will be given the opportunity to comment upon the way I have analysed and reported the data, and any further comments you wish to make at this stage may be incorporated into my findings. This stage of respondent validation of the research is intended to reflect the emphasis upon the collaborative nature of research in critical education research.

**Provisional questions for interview**

The following questions indicate the topics I would like to explore in interviews. It is possible that individual interviews will not cover all questions, according to the interests of the interviewee. Some interviews may explore other, related topics according to the interests of the interviewee.

1. Please can you tell me a little about your professional background and current position?

2. What do you understand by the concept of ‘critical pedagogy’?

3. What do you understand by the term ‘neoliberalism’?

4. Can you comment on the current policy environment and general atmosphere within English Further Education? For example, do you find the environment supports critical practice?

5. How does this environment affect your professional practice?

6. Why do you think critical pedagogy is important?

7. I am interested in the sources of, inspirations for and influences upon teachers’ pedagogical practice. For example, you may have been inspired by a particular theoretical standpoint, or by an individual, or by life experience in general, or by your membership of a particular organisation. In my case, for instance, I have been inspired by certain colleagues, by Freire’s writings, by my religious life and my trade union work. Could you tell me a little about your sources of inspiration? What sustains your commitment to critical pedagogy?

8. Could you give me some examples of critical pedagogic techniques / activities you have used?
9. What would help you to develop your critical pedagogy in the future?

10. Is there anything else you think it is important to add?

I do/ do not consent to participate in your doctoral research into critical pedagogy in Further Education.

Signed:  
Dated:
Appendix 2: History handout - Life in in 18th Century England

The print below was issued by William Hogarth in 1851. Discuss with your neighbour: what does the picture suggest to you about social conditions in England at that time?

Think about the following:

- Hogarth’s title for the etching was ‘Gin Lane’. Knowing that, can you add anything to your answer?
- Hogarth produced the picture as a companion to another print, ‘Beer Street’. Look it up on the internet. Now you have seen both pictures, can you add anything more to your answer?
“Paulson sees the images as working on different levels for different classes. The middle classes would have seen the pictures as a straight comparison of good and evil, while the working classes would have seen the connection between the prosperity of Beer Street and the poverty of Gin Lane. He focuses on the well-fed woman wedged into the sedan chair at the rear of Beer Street as a cause of the ruin of the gin-addled woman who is the principal focus of Gin Lane. The free-market economy espoused in the King's address and practised in Beer Street leaves the exponents prosperous and corpulent but at the same time makes the poor poorer. For Paulson the two prints depict the results of a move away from a paternalistic state towards an unregulated market economy.” (Wikipedia, referring to the art historian Ronald Paulson)

Now that you have read Paulson's view, can you add anything more to your answer? What kind of interpretive perspective do you think Paulson has here?

Now write a paragraph in answer to the question, 'What does the source material (Hogarth's 'Gin Lane') tell us about social conditions in England in the 18th century? (6 marks; 3 AO1, 3 AO2)