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### Orwellian code of behaviour

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## Orwellian Codes of Behaviour

### Exploring Ideological Power in Education Research Policy

“All the beliefs, habits, tastes, emotions, mental attitudes that characterise our time are really designed to sustain the mystique of the Party and prevent the true nature of present-day society from being perceived.”

“There was truth and there was untruth, and if you cling to the truth even against the whole world, you are not mad.”

George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

#### Abstract

Conceptions of education research as independent and serving the interests of truth have come to represent freedoms that emerge from the application of intellectual inquiry. Critiques of education research and its relevance to the enhancement of education, coupled with neo-liberal market-led pragmatism, have contributed to the erosion of an enlightenment heritage. In this nexus empowerment is replaced by control. There is an absence of analysis of the Scottish National Party's (SNP) education research policy which means its regime of governance through logics of quantification productive of asymmetries of power has gone unrecognized. It is argued this policy produces a metrification of teaching and research which constructs teaching and research as servile to external discourses. These encroachments into autonomy and professionalism are intellectually clandestine as they operate through assumptive worlds holding that evidence is value-free rather than the outcome of constructivist processes driven by choice. Orwell's dystopian vision of a subjugated society informs the meaning of the argument in the paper: that technologies of control and surveillance re-shape teacher autonomy and instrumentalize research such that its power to arbitrate is emasculated.

#### Keywords

Policy, research, control, dystopia, discourse, Orwell, disenchantment

## INTRODUCTION

Orwell's (1949/2003) *Nineteen Eighty-Four* dystopian future retains its moral force into the twentieth-first century.<sup>1</sup> The modelling of a research world as a quasi-medical scientific enterprise, as found in the Scottish Government's 2017 education research policy ('the 2017 strategy') causes the entombment of enlightenment values (Scottish Government, 2017). The eradication of humanistic traditions of cultural life including professionalism is congruent with modernisation and disenchantment. Modernisation eliminates traditional ideas and customs in favour of abstract rational criteria, interpersonal relationships and the "iron cage" (Lash et al, 1987). The logic of applied science and technical processes in industrial societies modifies traditional cultures that gave meaning to human life (Scott, 2015).

Zuboff (2019), in the vein of Orwell's allegorical purpose, argues that surveillance technologies operating through digitalization disfigure society and commodify human experience. The result is a world of centrally planned collectivist control. Technological developments, with data as their life blood, make the novel's tyranny yet more feasible than it was on publication in 1949 (Bloom, 1996). Its relevance has increased, not diminished. Orwell (1903-1950) argues that it is the obligation of writers to oppose social injustice, oppression and totalitarian inclinations which remove the power of independent thinking through regimes of hierarchical observation and normalising judgement (Qin, 2018). Orwell was aware that disinformation arose from institutions and states with capacities to invoke ignorance under the cloak of democratic sharing and enablement in his nightmarish tale of dystopian outcomes. As this paper argues, evidence discourse informs a fabric of domination capable of producing professional numbing, as teachers succumb to institutional asymmetries in knowledge and power.

The intellectual genealogy of this paper, including George Orwell's dystopian premise, is set out first, followed by the approach to data analysis. The outcome of that analysis is split into three discourses that arose from a close reading of the SNP's 2017 research strategy document. The first discourse is 'centralisation' and concerns the ideological and actual centralisation of research. The second discourse 'knowledge mobilisation' which refers to the synthesis and utilisation of existing knowledge. The final discourse, 'cultures of audit', is premised upon the finding that the aim of research under the terms of the 2017 strategy is to monitor and direct. This result connects with Orwell's Thought Police whose function is to identify and subdue deviation. The discussion section re-engages with the argument about the relevance of Orwell's dystopian nightmare to the meaning of the 2017 research strategy, drawing upon Scottish literature, including political studies of the SNP. As the content of the paper makes clear the argument connects with similar societal changes enveloping cultures of higher education where Deleuze's "Societies of Control" are present (Peters and Bulut, 2011; Peters, 2001: 97; Peters, 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> George Orwell (1949/2003) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London: Penguin Random House. The paper uses the 2003 edition with an introduction by Thomas Pynchon.

The umbrella term 'research' is used, it is argued, as a political device through which to filter a different basis for professionalism and support the growth of collaborative managerialism. This 2017 strategy sits within modernisation. The SNP government's 2017 research strategy was ostensibly designed merely to communicate a 'what works' positivist model of research which privileges "external forms of evidence"; in so doing, however, it constructs hegemonic truth claims that strategically marginalise alternative regimes of truth internal to the culture of education that coalesce with expressions of teacher autonomy through, for example, practitioner enquiry (Kreijlsler, 2013). The focus of this paper is on unravelling the meanings of the SNP's research strategy as an example of the increasingly dominant voice of evidence discourse and theorising its impact on cultures of teaching and professionalism. The latter's emphasis on data and evidence mobilisation inscribes a zeitgeist of monitoring. It is argued the SNP's 2017 research strategy paper encapsulates unacknowledged political meanings. According to Ball (2008, 2019) the construction of policy solutions as being a-political is a tactic to sidestep debates about policy values. Ball (1995) refers to 'Policy Science' which lies outside traditions of intellectual criticality and serendipity (see Nisbet, 1995:79).

In this paper the object of analysis is the document *A Research Strategy for Scottish Education* published in April 2017 by the Scottish Government under the *Social Research Series* ('the 2017 document'). Discourse analysis uncovers the 'trade secrets' contained within an apparently innocuous research framing. Trade secret protection can involve the suppression of information as it may hinder functioning in a marketplace where competing innovation policy concerns inhibit disclosure (Thomas, 2010; Robertson, 1982). The desire to control the policy direction of education research in Scotland is tantamount to the suppression of other narratives (McPherson, 1984, McPherson and Rabb, 1988). In this paper research control is framed centrally by the government through notions of data, evidence and quantitative knowledge management. Each notion is found in the 2017 research strategy. In terms of the concept of "propaganda" this strategy uses its hegemonic metrical weight to steer the system out of the hold of orthodoxies of professional autonomy, intuition, research serendipity where teachers are recognised as problem solvers (Baumfield et al, 2012: 1).

In the years prior to the 2017 SNP research strategy announcement, debate raged in the UK education research community about the relationship of research to policy (Whitty, 2006; Gorard, 2002, Humes, 2007). Qualitative paradigms bear the brunt of government-funded critiques of published educational research (Tooley and Darby, 1998). In Scotland, multi-million-pound funding supported the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS) (Taylor et al, 2007; Holligan, 2013) undertaken by Scottish universities. A parallel initiative in England – the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) - was undertaken by largely English universities. Highly critical evaluations of this applied education capacity building work in Scotland (2004-2009) were subsequently undertaken by a consortium of Scottish universities. The 'value-added' to policy and practice by the TLRP was also judged to be limited (Parsons and Burkey, 2011). These tensions reflect issues of power and control over research purposes and direction.

It is not surprising in the light of discourses of derision about forms of research and underpinning social theory, as well as the examples of disharmonious relations between government and academia, that government policymakers have turned to organisations and individuals outside of academia for research expertise that delivers according to the specifications set out by officials in contract tenders. Outsourcing government needs to the UK private sector, including research tenders, is commonplace (Holligan, 2013). Contractual clauses will prescribe aims and impose constraints on knowledge sharing; in this way a political elite sets the boundaries of the communicative agenda including what counts as knowledge. In China the 'Ministry of Education' was re-named the 'Ministry of Truth' (which has the purpose of distortion) by a critic who, referencing Orwell's work, argued that Ministry specialised in communist propaganda (Yang, 2011).

Sutherland's (2001) qualitative deconstruction of SNP policy texts through discourse analysis illuminates the SNP's 'neo-nationalism'. That nationalism, she argued, is constructed through discursive manipulative rhetoric. Sutherland (2001) claimed the SNP's reach for hegemony indicated a deliberate downplaying of nation and foregrounding of an ideology of 'common sense' populism (Mackay, 2015). Knowledge control is always important for achieving political goals, as twentieth century European history reminds us. Control over audit practices gives opportunity to control the nature of education and to define the boundaries of wider policy (Power, 1997). Blunted curiosity is part of a wider anti-intellectualism that grew in tandem with the more specific tensions explored in this paper. A zeitgeist of disenchantment is confirmed by the critical analysis of the 2017 SNP strategy given later in this paper (see Furedi, 2004; Collini, 2012).

In essence a dystopia is an illusion of a perfect society where moral, technocratic or bureaucratic control results in citizens living under constant surveillance, fearing the outside world, their lives de-humanized and controlled by propaganda. The argument of this paper is not that the SNP's research strategy is creating an Orwellian dystopia, but rather that it bears potential comparison with some Orwellian themes in that its technocratic ideology imposes extensive bureaucratic control and, through processes of surveillance audit, squeezes individuality. Control of information typified the British Empire, the power of which would not have extended as it did to many parts of a colonial empire without that pervasive bureaucracy; today in the US security world this domination is known as 'Total Information Awareness' (Marsden, 2014: 100).

Fairclough (2013: 8) argues ideologies are meanings in the service of power. This power is enunciated in language which expresses an ideology: at present this is neo-liberal capitalism characterised by free markets and the reduction of the public sector, including the introduction of free markets into the world of research (Fairclough, 2013: 11). The 2017 SNP's education research strategy's stated aim is to service the needs of the Scottish system and to that end research is framed in the service of practical requirements, to

"...contribute to the achievement of the aims in the National Improvement Framework and improving the capacity of the education system in Scotland to produce and use research, evidence and data. The current strategy is primarily focussed on the work that is being conducted in schools and school age children.

However, the aim is to expand the focus of the strategy in the long term to encompass the full educational journey in Scotland” (p.5).

The four priorities for National Improvement embrace the amelioration of inequalities. Recent choices of research methodologies illustrate in use the orientation of the 2017 research strategy: four research studies published in 2018 on the Scottish Government website illustrate methodological and value orientations. Each study was undertaken without the participation of academic researchers and they adopt quantitative evaluations.<sup>2</sup> This Scottish Government research orientation reflects the spirit of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and European Commission research on education, evidence-synthesis, ‘what works’, skills and employability.<sup>3</sup> The Royal Society (2018) defines evidence-synthesis as the process of bringing together information from a range of sources and disciplines to inform policy-making, arguing it represents an invaluable contribution of the research community to policymakers. The terminology ‘what works’ refers to the field of evidence-based policy and practice in public services. A political inspiration for ‘what works’ was the government’s white paper on modernizing government that promulgated the view that policy decisions should be based upon sound evidence including evidence delivered by social science (Adam et al, 2017; Cabinet Office, 1999). Kreijsler (2013: 16) argues evidence discourse “emerged from the medical field as a bottom up professional strategy”, a thesis questioned in this paper, it being proposed instead that evidence discourse annexes ideological governance from above, coalescing educational practice with medical practice to modify the nature of professionalism.

## **METHODOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

According to Norman Fairclough, in analysing textual rhetoric the analysis must be answerable to the detailed properties of texts (Fairclough, 2013). Contrary to the simplistic claim that research inevitably settles empirically competing views, even in natural scientific studies the prion disease controversy illustrates biomedical competing and unresolved hypotheses (Kim, 2003). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) encompasses social engagement and political emancipation, and it has several variants; Fairclough’s version, with its social theoretical purchase, is the one followed in this article (Reisigl, 2013). According to Fairclough (2013) the materiality of social relations is influenced by social constructions made by social subjects such as producers and audiences. The methodological framework is flexible in application and includes content analysis and the deconstruction of ideological presuppositions. Discourse and social structures interpenetrate. Fairclough’s approach is influenced by Michel Foucault’s concepts such as power-knowledge and discursive practice.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Research/by-topic/education-and-training/publications>. Downloaded: 8/7/20.

<sup>3</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/volume-2-2019-education-and-training-monitor-country-analysis.pdf>. Downloaded: 28/7/20;  
[https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20\(05.04.2018\).pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf). Downloaded: 28/7/20; <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/48727127.pdf>. Downloaded: 28/7/20.

Power for Fairclough and Foucault limits what is permitted and is possible within a given ideologically organised context. Unlike Foucault, Fairclough places more emphasis on language in use where it is seen as a form of social practice (Jorgensen et al, 2020). CDA rejects the notion of a 'neutral science' and the possibility of an objective view of the research object.

### **Discourse One: Centralisation**

The language and vocabulary that present phenomena create a social construction of ideology (Li et al, 2018). The section headings in the 2017 document are presented in very large bold type face and the choice of textual organisation sets a prescriptive and directive tone, constructing the 2017 strategy's identity as belonging with action, rather than reflection or dialogue. We do not know whether the "organisations contacted" listed in Annex A played a significant part or even whether they responded at all. The "Universities" are listed below the policy bodies such as Skills Development Scotland, What Works Scotland and Scottish Qualifications Authority, indicative of the practical orientation of the research policy culture of audit. The lexicon of the larger of the bold type face sectional headings includes: "The research challenge", "Key Actions", "Delivery and Costs", "Oversight", "Evaluation", "The OECD recommendations", "System characteristics and performance: What works and what has worked?", "Performance", "Empowering practitioners to produce and use evidence and data", "Delivery" and "Cost".<sup>4</sup> It is a cosmos of governmentality, reinforcing neo-liberal performativity. There are no references to academic authors or journals or books. Rules, procedures and action plans, and phrases such as "must work" and "must collaborate" are symbolic markers of the controlling modernisation thesis raised in this paper's introduction. The sociology of these lexical choices contributes to an ethos of centralisation and audit. An emphasis on high degrees of control over what counts as research and useful knowledge necessitates the marginalisation of critical methodologies and voices. In this case, therefore, the Orwellian Ministry of Education characterisation of research and its role denies space for different voices.

A controlling narrative has a corollary of thought control, a theme that can be continued by an analysis of the data search limitations within the National Improvement Hub data base for teachers, created by Education Scotland. This is an online resource for finding "resources, articles or exemplars on improving outcomes for learners". Education Scotland, an executive agency of the Scottish Government, states that its object is "developing creativity, employability and skills". Listed on the hub as the "most popular learning resources" are "Curriculum for Excellence Benchmarks", "An Empowered System", "Early Level Play Pedagogy Toolkit". An interrogation of the search tool in July 2020 for the term 'Psychology' yielded 18 results but for 'Sociology' no results at all. The implication of this search outcome is that the educators' minds are being inculcated into ideological convergence and, by default, discouraged from engaging with critical visions of the

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<sup>4</sup> The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development was founded in 1961 and is based in Paris. It is an intergovernmental economic organisation.



education system available in sociological literature including alternative or radical models of its processes and purpose.

Centralisation within a convergent mindset is embedded within the 2017 document's lexicon. It states that "each level of the education system in Scotland has a vital role in harnessing the power of evidence and data in order to deliver continuous improvement..." A discourse of "leadership" is advanced to organise and energise a centralised approach to data usage and evidence management. In bold type face each level task is set out within this "coherent approach to using data across the system". Scottish Government and Education Scotland are required to "work effectively with national bodies GTCS, SCEL, ADES and SCDE." Their collective role is to search for, "international evidence", and to then make it "available to the school system" suggesting a profound departure from humanistic traditions of action orientated research associated with practitioner enquiry (Baumfield et al, 2012; Stenhouse, 1980).

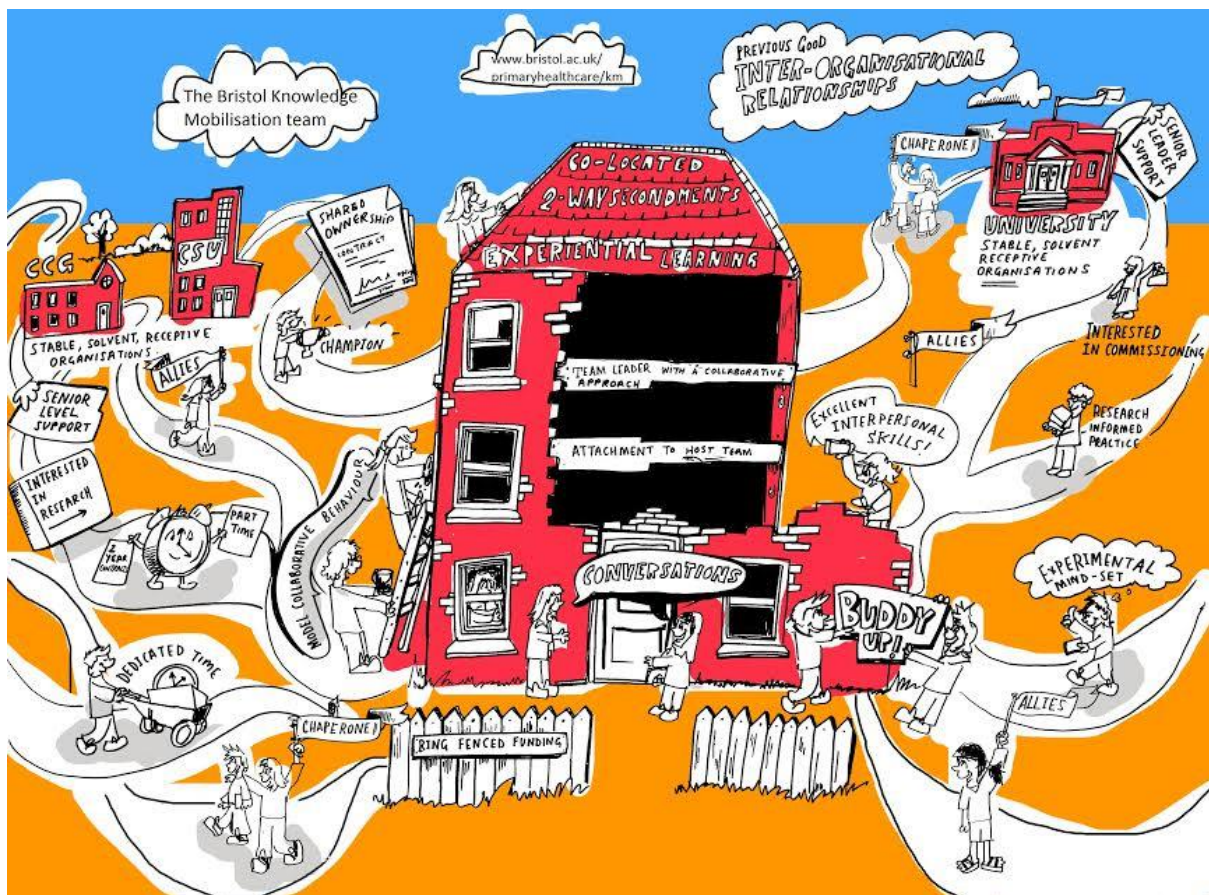
Knowledge, in the 2017 strategy scenario, is a disciplinary device. It comes into the system from the top and moves through steps into the chalk-face. Recourse to the OECD earlier in the document, as well as reliance on the nebulous notion of "international evidence", shifts the orbit of Scottish educational practice into the neo-liberal European nexus which contributes to the professional lexicon of Scotland. The classroom forfeits its unique cultural heritage as it is forced to import "international evidence". Research has become a coloniser. Teachers are encouraged to act on and "implement the lessons of research". Power is articulated through research data, which is now a touchstone of truth, and yet, as such data is rarely uncontentious in meaning and application, the strength of the commitment to a general ideology of evidence is clear. The second bureaucratic tool of centralising discourse involves nameless "Local authorities" (LAs): the latter are mediators of knowledge who must "collaborate with school leaders and teachers to identify patterns in outcomes across their areas" (p.8).

This discursive presentation illustrates an administrative business logic. The LAs are tasked to "deploy appropriate interventions and monitor lessons for improvement" (p.8). The outcome of this 'research' has to be fed upwards into "the national policy context". Research in this discourse is a machine of abstracted governance. Thirdly, "School leaders" are expected to "collaborate" to also "identify patterns and outcomes" with staff, parents and young people/children. The character of this nebulous task is left unspecified. The discourse compels the expectation of research findings without any discussion of resourcing, expertise or methodologies. It is the ideology of a view of scientific research as neutral, however, that is most significant. Centralisation is held together by the glue of power in an apparatus of evidence disassociated from actual research traditions or problematizations. Under a guise of "research" a new genre of 'objective' managerialism, with a performativity thrust that will annihilate the past, echoes through the 2017 strategy. Quality control of product is the genre of research illustrated through the discursive linguistic repetition of lexical terminology and decisive phraseology; these are themes developed throughout the next two sections.

## Discourse Two: Knowledge mobilisation

According to the University of Bristol Centre for Academic Primary Care “knowledge mobilisation is about making information useable and accessible through working collaboratively...to encourage researchers, commissioners and clinicians to work together.”<sup>5</sup> This medical context’s valorisation of professionalism and research connects the 2017 education research strategy with medical science. According to Bristol this image illustrates the work of the Knowledge Mobilisation (KM) team:

Figure 1  
Knowledge mobilisation



KM informs practices of the National Institute for Health Research including KM achieved through Cochrane and systematic reviews.<sup>6</sup> Performance pressures arising from a medical science ideology are likely to narrow the curriculum in schools, increase a cultural fakery around education and foster the technicisation of professional knowledge (Connell, 2013). Hargreaves (1996) argues in favour of teaching as an evidenced based profession; in his estimation it ought to model itself on practices in medicine. His critique of education

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/primaryhealthcare/researchthemes/km/what-is-knowledge-mobilisation/>. Downloaded: 15/7/20.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/effective-knowledge-mobilisation-methods-cochrane-reviews/12233>. Downloaded: 15/07/20.

research as “non-cumulative” and his desire for a new national research strategy agenda, which takes research towards a more applied collaborative model, utilises a technical vocabulary without recourse to intuitive justifications and has remarkable parallels, despite the historical distance of twenty-one years, with the professional ideology of research and evidence embedded in the Scottish 2017 strategy.

The 2017 strategy helps form the institutional arrangements for control by neo-liberal forces whose discourses are already evident throughout it. As noted within Discourse One, the neoliberal view of education and its coupling with research is about creating skills and attitudes for the workforce of a market economy. The term “Skills” is on the front cover of the strategy in the subtitle: “Children, Education and Skills”. The shaping of the knowledge base of education is being re-engineered through ‘research’ as the change agent. Olsen and Peters’ (2007) study of higher education highlights a de-professionalizing of academic staff as line management chains replace delegated power and prohibit the emergence of autonomous space, and accountability is measured in terms of process, formulated as “indicators” and “standards”. A discourse of knowledge mobilisation is filtered through choice of terminology in the 2017 strategy: “training”, “useful research”, reporting lines”, “practitioner intelligibility”, “power of evidence” and cognate ideological expressions including “management structures”, “maximum synergy”, “productive use of standardised assessment data” and, in context, this section’s rubric

“...We will ensure that Education Scotland’s forthcoming knowledge mobilisation strategy, and the actions that follow, are informed by the most-up-to-date evidence.” (Scottish Government, 2017: 13)

The enacted knowledge mobilisation co-opts evidence on trust without any recognition of its relativity to values, methodological assumptions and contextual validity. Privileged evidence is quantitative, suggestive of the development of a metrics of schooling and cultures of measurement. The cosmos of education that we see being developed is de-contextualised. It is populated through abstracted discourses of “indicators”, “international comparisons”, “outcomes”, “knowledge translation”, “bespoke index”, “standardised assessments”, “dissemination of evidence”, “complex evaluations” and:

“...the **utilisation of existing datasets** in order to provide new analysis or focused, evaluative work.<sup>7</sup> Again we will consider the funding mechanisms in place, but also the training of new quantitative researchers, both in fundamental methodology and in familiarity with our education data bases.” (p. 8).

The autonomy of the teacher to enquire is restricted by the values that characterise these external forms of evidence sedimented through processes of knowledge synthesis which will prohibit the emergence of a critical habitus, ruining the possibility of the emergence of that autonomous space foregrounded by Olsen and Peters (2007) in their critique of similar processes impacting the university academic. Newman and Mowbray (2012), by contrast with the controlling habitus of hollowed-out professionalism described throughout this

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<sup>7</sup> Bold type is used in the 2017 document, p.8.

discourse analysis, provide an alternative empowering model of autonomy. In this model teachers, through sustaining communities of practice with academic partners in self-initiated projects, experienced shifts in their professional habitus. Lawrence and Murray (2013: 7) characterise autonomy by drawing upon traditions of practitioner-based inquiry where educational research informs continuous professional development; in this case the motif is democratization and empowerment, not de-skilling.

The bureaucratic discourses of alliance, partnership, stakeholders and patterns of policy administration described under Discourse One, underpin the “mobilisation” strand of the knowledge that will be mined and then exploited prior to its conveyance into school classrooms. Original research studies premised on critical methodologies capable of probing cultural orthodoxies are anathema to a bureaucratizing evidence mantra designed to rule through a domineering regime of truth. Under this ideology of evidence mobilization, the meaning of the notion of research is subjugated to processes of analysis and synthesis of data designed to establish “how a full picture of system performance is gathered” (p. 9). That imagery of education presented in the mode of a machine to be engineered locates education in a capitalist ontology of business performativity. The end goal of the national effort is to determine “what works” through mindsets whose cultivation is congruent with business pragmatism and the trope of the knowledge economy and what Olsen and Peters (2007) call “knowledge capitalism”. This section’s analysis reverberates with Hume’s (2013: 19) study of the control of education research in Scotland. Humes argues that research

“...is seen as part of an overall ‘knowledge management’ strategy, which will ‘translate’ research into forms that are easily accessible to practitioners, and use it to analyse, reflect on and challenge current policy...The hope is that policy and practice become much more ‘evidence informed’. Ensuring that the findings of good research are implemented effectively is seen as particularly challenging, an example of the wider problem of managing change.”

A lacuna in this 2017 research policy strategy argument is that it overlooks questions of ideological orientation and its reflection in the value base held by government about the purpose of education, the nature of teaching and the purposes of knowledge creation. Ideology is likely to be the filter used to support processes of ‘translation’ to the classroom. Humes omits to raise the fears of Connell (2013) who argues neoliberalism will foster cultural fakery and impose administrative logics over teachers. Humes recognises that government policy on research impacts the academic freedom of educational research academics in universities which, as this paper suggests, is one reason for the government’s shift away from utilising academic research talent: that freedom clashed with its hegemony of ideological control within neo-liberal aspirations. There is a case then to cease analysing the 2017 research policy as limited to education policy effects, and not to assume its origins lie within policy cultures of education research.

The SNP’s election victory in 2007 contained a tax-cutting measure inspired by neo-liberalism’s free-market economics. To achieve their subsequent victory in 2011 the SNP attracted former Conservative party millionaire businessmen (Camp, 2014). Some argue, however, that the SNP is a left of centre party which nevertheless accepts the pragmatism

of political leaders whose biographical credentials are often in the business sector (Mitchell et al, 2011). Arnott and Ozga (2010) argue a key aspect of the SNP's approach to governance was to build new relationships with partners and that this governing style indicated a shift highlighting the importance of 'discourse' where texts, including speech, are used to promote policy aims and agendas.

The loss of teacher autonomy is a more pressing reality, and more vulnerable to the prescriptions described, as these require teachers to 'obey' evidence and data sets on a routine basis; to act otherwise might be deemed a "thoughtcrime" during annual performance appraisals. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 'knowledge mobilisation' occurs through the censorship of impermissible sources, books, pamphlets, films and photographs, "every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance" (Orwell, 1949/2003: 47). To ensure a constant control of knowledge the Party in this work of dystopian fiction removed records of views that "conflicted with the needs of the moment... All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and re-inscribed exactly as often as was necessary...Statistics were just as much a fantasy in their original version as in their rectified version." (p. 48). The comings and goings of evidence-based policy will sustain a professional palimpsest which will govern practitioners' histories, scraping and re-inscribing signposts based on evolving data bases of 'research'.

### **Discourse three: Cultures of audit**

British social anthropologists Shore and Wright (1999: 557) argue governments have made many attempts to create an 'audit culture' in universities: audit technologies are framed in terms of 'quality', 'accountability' and 'empowerment'. They argue this culture imposes "a new form of coercive and authoritarian governmentality...it reduces professional relations to crude, quantifiable, and above all 'inspectable' templates" characteristic of neo-liberal governmentality. As Winston, the protagonist in Orwell's (1949/2003: 60-61) novel, is reminded by Syme, a Party supporter,

"Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible because there will be no words in which to express it...Its merely a question of self-discipline, reality-control".

Traditional language and thought are called 'Oldspeak' in Orwell and characterised as dense with "vagueness and its useless shades of meaning." (p. 60). Orwell was aware of governmentality and 'empowerment'. Ball (2010) emphasises in his analysis of school teacher work what he calls the "terrors of performativity" where teachers are forced into an 'iron cage' of targets, indicators and evaluations, arguing this fosters cultural fakery as individuals and organisations construct protective fabrications in response to performance audit.

The 2017 research strategy does not directly formulate arguments favourable to audit. Instead, the argumentation is realised semiotically through a macro-strategy of legitimation around discourses of centralisation and knowledge mobilisation. The political strategy driving the 2017 document compels us to accept, as an inevitable effect of the general ideology, processes that in different forms involve audit. Through the discourse of research, they annex a parallel discourse of tacit depoliticalising of their neo-liberal engagement. In

order to “use evidence” it must be made available, which presupposes the deployment of audit. A generalised example is as follows:

“...Study how to make the best use of data produced in the school system, e.g. through the National Improvement Framework or school level assessments.” (p. 4)

And,

“Academic input and scrutiny will come from two organisations, firstly through regular reporting to the International Council of Education Advisers, and an Academic Reference Group...” (p. 5).

Besides the OECD another favoured partner is the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) based in London and tasked to partner the National Improvement Hub. The stated aim of the EEF is to provide evidence-based resources to improve practice. The EEF website explains that among other activities it provides “tool-kits” and a “DIY evaluate guide”.<sup>8</sup> The ideological cosmos and substance of the EEF has a high family evaluative resemblance to the Scottish Government’s 2017 research strategy. Practitioners are required to self-audit, apprehensions around which are described by Ball (2010). The lexicon conjures quantitative data and statistical analysis. The audit lexicon is also illustrated by a plethora of technical phraseology which may bestow on the teacher, as Ball (2010) suggests, a “calculative” professional mentality, with concerns to “identify patterns and outcomes within their schools”, “monitor impact to learn lessons”, and imperatives around “dissemination of evidence on ‘what works’”, “developing improved data on Health and Wellbeing” and the “Evaluation of the Scottish Attainment Challenge”. These audit interventions nourish regimes of control through their development of metrical data. Reference to OECD recommendations include the bullet point:

“Develop metrics that do justice to the full range of CfE<sup>9</sup> capacities informing a bold understanding of quality and equity. This implies efforts to collect data for a wider range of indicators” (p.6)

The OECD presents itself as an international organisation that “works to build better polices for better lives.” It states it is a “knowledge-hub for data and analysis...and international standard setting.”<sup>10</sup> Three of the several images under the heading “Who we are” on the OECD’s marketing website are of the British billionaire businessman Richard Branson, the Queen of Jordan and the neoliberal French president Emmanuel Macron. The SNP’s policy foundations interconnected with the prestige of figures forming the global capital network. In the final section a wider framing for understanding the 2017 research strategy is explored, including studies of the SNP as a political party and tensions within the Scottish policy elite.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/>. Downloaded: 15/7/20.

<sup>9</sup> CfE refers to the Curriculum for Excellence, Scotland’s national curriculum.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/>. Downloaded: 15/7/20.

## DISCUSSION

The term “Orwellian” as adopted in this paper conjures draconian control under the apparently neutral guise of ‘research strategy’. Politics is about power and meaning (Poole, 1999). The political control over educational research has been an area of longstanding debate in Scotland and England (Gorard, 2002; Humes, 2013). The SNP’s business friendly pragmatism is a pivot on which its acceptance of research pragmatism and affinities with cultures of business accountancy coalesce (Camp, 2014; Mackay, 2015). The research networks into which the 2017 strategy inserts itself is consistent with pan European neo-liberal values (Sutherland, 2001). The SNP’s alliances with the EEF and the OECD is indicative of its policy favouritism towards neo-liberal business values, including a ‘what works’ non-nonsense ontology of indubitable truth.

George Orwell recognized genres of politicalised language and their role in the manufacture of systemic distortion. Deception is illustrated through his notion of the phenomenon called Doublethink. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that contradictory mental presence entails the conscious use of deception for political ends through conjuring total honesty (Saunders, 2008). Examples of doublethink in 1984 include “Freedom is Slavery” and “War is Peace”. Users of doublethink believe each slogan is true despite the contradiction. The 2017 strategy inclines to doublethink in its tacit propagandistic slogans such as its use of the word “Research” rather than “Control” or the word “Collaborate” rather than “Manage”. Single word or phraseological coined slogans highlight interactions between meanings and the exercise of political power. The Party in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* used doublethink to propagate campaigns designed to psychologically manipulate. Doublespeak makes public doublethink and illustrates discourses which deliberately obscure, disguise and distort the meaning of language. Terse euphemism is a common linguistic vehicle to communicate doublethink. School staffroom culture in due course may coin the phrase ‘what works’ to actually mean ‘what erodes’. Through this socio-linguistic prism the 2017 strategy represents, in keeping with the argument in this paper, policy euphemism.

As the introduction to the paper makes clear the meaning underlying the empirical basis of the argument presented is that social silencing and alienation of educational practitioners may be produced by an application of a hegemony of evidence and data discourse. A second theme intertwined with the argument originating historically from Orwell’s novel is that knowledge production, rather than being a benign influence on educational practice, will marginalise established cultures of local practices. The status of medical science as an evidence based discipline, in being incorporated into methodologies of educational research, will inevitably impose truth regimes that are more convincing and useful to policy elites than the more serendipitous cultures characterising cultures of practitioner inquiry,’ despite the latter’s recognition of the importance of context. The discourses identified through the analysis foreground systematic monitoring of outcomes and interventions. In the nature of this audit culture is the tendency to centralise and generalise. The analysis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* prefigured the ways in which “Societies of Control” secure obedience by undermining space for the exercise and application of independent thought and judgement. The uncritical passion for metrical systems in the 2017 strategy undergirded by

positivistic research methodologies that conserve rather than challenge assumptions and values will inevitably re-frame the infinitely valuable world of classroom practice.

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