CAPÍTULO 2

THE DEMAND FOR TRUTH: THE FORMATION AND EFFECTIVITY OF NEOLIBERAL RESEARCH

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Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards its pursuit (Foucault, 1980, p. 93).

During periods of problematisation, governments were forced to either adapt their programmes or launch justifications for what they were doing. It is at these times that we often gain greatest insight into the mechanisms of government and the means used to resist them. These insights must focus on *both* discipline and governmentality, technologies that complement and dovetail with each other.

Legg (2005, p. 137): *Universities are quintessentially institutions organised around truth*. Truth is required from us – we are producers of truth, and we are rewarded for our truth production. I am seeking to take up here Foucault's concern not with <u>*what is true*</u>, but, as with his other concerns, the *how* of truth and 'the system of truth and falsity' itself (Foucault, 2013). That is, how some things come to count as true, how some persons become authorised speakers of truth, and how some statements, discourses and practices rooted in truth are generated (Rose, 1999). As (Burchell, 1996) argues an historian of the present must 'have a concern for truth' and 'must be meticulous in describing the shapes it assumes' (p. 32). Bearing in mind, as Foucault says, that nothing is true that is not the product of power.

So that 'instead of trying to find out what truth is' here, following Foucault's imperative, I am trying to understand why we accord truth ultimate value, and place

ourselves 'absolutely under its thrall' (Foucault,1988, p. 107). Truth is always a 'system of exclusion' (Foucault, 2013, p. 2) – by which here I mean the privileging of certain sorts of research and research questions and the exclusion of others - and it is 'a system of constraint which is exercised not only on other discourses, but on a whole series of other practices' (p. 2). These discourses 'present themselves to subjects as environments fully on a par with the physical environment' (Prado, 2006, p. 86). I want to sketch some aspects of the contemporary research environment for the human sciences in relation to something we might call *Neoliberal Research* and this addresses the argument that 'current debates over what counts as evidence in state policy formation are indeed debates over what counts as educational research (Luke & Hogan, 2006). At this moment within the politics of truth there is a clear privileging of statements, that articulate 'what works' and are founded by the procedures of medical research - RCTs.

It is a question of what governs statements, and the way in which they govern each other so as to constitute a set of propositions which are scientifically acceptable, and hence capable of being verified or falsified by scientific procedures. In short, there is a problem of the régime, the politics of the scientific statement. (Rabinow, 1987, p. 54).

Here I want to address the *financialization* and the *politicisation* and *depoliticization* of research, that is, the rewards and costs of truth. I want to link this with another key assertion of Foucault's that: 'The emergence of social science cannot, as you see, be isolated from the rise of this new political rationality, and from this new political technology' (Foucault, 1988, p. 162) – neoliberalism. That is, in its current specificity, the reconversion of social scientific labour into a form of neoliberal expertise which has the management of the population as its aim. Such 'expert knowledges give rise to much of what we "say" and "see" or the objects that we take to exist in the world and how we talk about them' (Walter, 2008, p. 540). In other words, the constitution of what we might call – in several senses – the new *grey sciences*. What I am adumbrating here, both the neoliberalising of research and the deployment of research to the project of neoliberalisation (a double) is at the same time making us as researchers docile and productive (another double). As Connell suggests:

We have not yet … fully assimilated the profound consequences of the neoliberal turn for the basic project of education (p. 99) the wider effect of neoliberalism on the knowledge base: an increasing technicization of knowledge and knowledge production (Connell, 2013, p. 108).

Or to paraphrase slightly Sarah Amsler: *Neoliberalism is now not only 'in the house' in English universities but also fast becoming constitutive of the very criteria of what counts as research (my change) itself'* (Amsler, 2011, p. 67).

We see all of this manifest in the current relations between research and education policy but also in the grandeur and force and effectivity of such things as PISA league tables, world ranking systems of universities, examination and testing procedures and protocols and the analysis of test data which orient both national education policy making and classroom pedagogies and decision-making (Ball, Maguire *et al.*, 2011).

These numerical and statistical truths flow 'around a diversity of apparatuses for the production, circulation, accumulation, authorization and realization of truth' (Rose, 1996, p. 45) that include the university, research councils, funding bodies, foundations, government departments etc. They are both political, a mode of governing, and profitable – the neoliberal dream – another double.

One could suggest that the OECD's greatest impact has been in relation to its Indicators agenda, including PISA, and its role in constructing a global educational policy field through *governance by comparison*... (Grek, Lawn *et al.*, 2009).

New governance forms promote ways of controlling and shaping behaviour that mix material and discursive strategies: the discursive mobilisation of new norms and values is combined with external regulatory mechanisms (such as competitive indicators of performance) which together seek to transform the conduct of organisations and individuals in their capacity as 'self-actualising' agents … Knowledge and information thus play a pivotal role both in the pervasiveness of governance and in allowing the development of its dispersed, distributed and disaggregated form (Ozga, 2011).

We can glimpse here the role of research as part of a larger, more complex and integrated system of measurement and comparison (see Bradbury xxx on the

datafication of the pre-school classroom) which is intended to make the population more visible and more maleable. This is research as a form of bio-surveillance, a continuous process of monitoring based on tests and metrics and the analysis of the data they produce. This enables, in its current iteration what (Allen, 2014, p. 236) calls 'the supervision process'. Or as (Rose, 1999, p. 232) puts it: In analyses of democracy, a focus on numbers is instructive, for it helps us turn our eyes from the grand texts of philosophy to the mundane practices of pedagogy, of counting, of information and polling, and to the mundane knowledges of "grey sciences" that support them.

Within all of this there is a silent coupling of knowledge and power as a means by which we assign people to positions/categories and assign them value/worth: that is 'the promise that categorization and comparison through standardised measurements, or *capta* will reveal and illuminate essential truths about students, teachers and schools' (Pignatelli, 1993). In other words, 'the technology of statistics creates the capacity to relate to reality as a field of government' (Hunter, 1996, p. 154).

Education researchers are directly involved in the design and evaluation of programmes and practices that are intended to maximise the productivity and efficiency of students and teachers and are forms of investment in such productivity (see below). (While there are themselves subject to exactly such programmes and practices.) This involves, 'the invention, contestation and operationalization of various rational programmes {e.g. blended learning} and techniques {e.g. real time performance monitoring} that try to conduct behaviours so that specific results can be obtained' (Rose, 1999, p. 20) {my examples}. (Bailey, 2014) describes this as a kind of *performative promise* (an *obligation* or *debt) that we make – as we seek* as researchers to have an 'impact' on and change the world. We can see this in the increasing amounts of educational research that is becoming part of 'data-work', the collection/production, management, analysis, interpretation and of maintaining the flows of data are now 'part of everyday life in modern "learning"/"knowing" organisations' (Kelly & Downey, 2011, p. 416). These data serve to organize, order and evaluate practices and to 'trigger' interventions, which are also designed by researchers, and sold by CPD providers and education services companies, with the performative promise explicitly made – as in the case of Pearson Education.

We provide a range of education products and services to institutions, governments and direct to individual learners, that help people everywhere aim higher and fulfil their true potential.

Our commitment to them requires a holistic approach to education. It begins by using research to understand what sort of learning works best, it continues by bringing together people and organizations to develop ideas, and it comes back round by measuring the outcomes of our products.

(https://www.pearson.com/about-us.html accessed 15.07.16)

In the lecture series *Security, Territory, Population* (Foucault, 2009), Foucault shows how the disease of smallpox was dealt with by the emergent state from the eighteenth century onwards. Rather than deploying techniques of exclusion or quarantine, as for leprosy and the plague, the focus for intervention now rested on determining probabilities and establishing averages through the use of statistics who might live, who might die, who was at risk. The fundamental problem for security became its management of the disease which involved Foucault says:

"Knowing how many people are infected with smallpox, at what age, with what effects, with what mortality rate, lesions or after-effects, the risks of inoculation, the probability of an individual dying or being infected by smallpox despite inoculation, and the statistical effects on the population in general. In short, it will no longer be the problem of exclusion, as with leprosy, or of quarantine, as with the plague, but...the medical campaigns that try to halt epidemic or endemic phenomena" (p. 10).

The point of medical intervention is re-defined. What is different now from the 18th and 19th centuries is that the state as an - 'ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics' (ibid p. 108) no longer limits itself to letting natural processes 'take their course' and then manage the result, rather it is about intervening in the inevitable. The population is made malleable. The national resource of human skill is nurtured. A particular economy of power is established which aims at raising, enhancing, improving, maximising capabilities and, at the same time, the production of particular modes of subjectification, in which

individuals can be brought to work on themselves, under certain forms of authority, in relation truth discourses, by means of practices of the self.

There is another level of 'meta-analysis' in this neoliberal dispositif – that is, research, of certain sorts, is now deployed to identify effective and cost-efficient programmes and initiatives (PRP, phonics, grouping by ability, home-school cooperation, positive parenting) which can be identified as driving up student performance and reducing teaching costs (another double) - and which at the same time displace teachers' situated decision-making.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is an independent grant-making charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational … The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) exists to fund, develop and evaluate cost effective and replicable projects which address educational disadvantage., ensuring that children from all backgrounds can fulfil their potential and make the most of their talents.

This is a new empiricism, even almost a new positivism (Lingard, 2013, p. 121). It is one manifestation of 'the politics of the scientific statement', addressed to questions of what is to count as 'research' and as 'truth'. Here we can see truth 'as a system of exclusion' in operation.

… currently there are attempts around the globe to wind back gains in critical theory and methodologies as applied to education research and to tame educational research in the direction of state policy requirements and problem-solving epistemologies and ontologies" (Lingard, 2013, p. 122).

More and more research funding and activity are devoted to designing, producing, analysing, interpreting and disseminating research 'solutions' and their effects. We can see all of this perhaps most clearly in relation to the US policy programme No Child Left Behind. In funding of the programme Congress defined and mandated a specific version of research and science which would provide the 'evidence base' for school practices. Such research would identify pedagogies and forms of organisation that are 'effective' and cost efficient – value for money.

The Sutton Trust-EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit is an accessible summary of educational research which provides guidance for teachers and schools on how to use their resources to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

Why is research useful?

We know that the relationship between spending and pupil outcomes is not simple. Between 1997 and 2011 per pupil spending increased by 85% but over this period improvements in pupil outcomes were marginal on most measures. At school level, it is clear that different ways of spending school budgets can have very different impacts on pupil attainment, and choosing what to prioritise is not easy. Even once a decision to implement a particular strategy has been taken there are a wide variety of factors which determine its impact. We believe that educational research can help schools get the maximum "educational bang for their buck", both in terms of making an initial choice between strategies, and in implementing a strategy as effectively as possible.

Figure 1. EEF website: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk

ESEA Title 1 (NCLB) Requires that schools select programmes that are 'evidence-based': using research that "involves application of rigorous, systematic and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge … and employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment; involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses … using experimental or quasi experimental designs….

Smith, Miller-Kahn *et al*., 2004 comment 'that the state should appropriate the term science and attach it to one form of science and one segment of scientists' is a 'remarkable – even a breath-taking feat' (p. 183). Here what is authorised as a 'serious statement' is clearly demarcated, what is unauthorised is excluded.

Such truths are also circulated and legitimated by a set of relatively new knowledge intermediaries and brokers (Lingard, 2013, p. 125) – which have 'potentially reductive effects on the width and scope of research agendas in education, attempting to focus such research on matters of interest to policy makers' (p. 125). There is an increasing variety of third sector platforms that digest, organise and disseminate ideas that 'work' and evidence that is 'good'.

BEE – Best Evidence Encyclopaedia

WWC – What Works Clearinghouse

BP – Blueprints

SPW – Social Programs that Work

E2S – Evidence to Success

AL – Allen Review

Note: The Campbell Collaboration does systematic reviews but does not provide a rating of interventions.

SCIE – Social Care Institute for Excellence uses qualitative descriptions but not ratings

NICE – National Institute for Clinical Excellence uses odds ratios 23/45 and descriptions but not ratings

Figure 2. grey science

These are new sites of *grey science*, and new *enclosures*: 'relatively bounded locales or fields of judgement within which their authority is concentrated, intensified and rendered difficult to countermand' (Rose, 1996, p. 50). They constitute a neoliberal enlightenment expressed in 'a discourse that suppresses references to the effective strategic considerations (that is, power, control and self-interest) and instead enshrines references to progress, efficiency, best practice, science, expertise, professionalism, coordination and the Common Good' (Higgins, 1996, p. 10-11). Ideology and normativity, and the possibility of debate are erased.

Issues of standards and accountability, are typically presented by politicians and policymakers as matters of technical efficiency rather than normative choices. As a consequence, their political nature, including the deep implication of these discourses with issues of socio-political power, is effectively backgrounded (Clarke, 2012, p. 298).

Education as a public responsibility and site of democratic and ethical practice is replaced by education as a production process, a site of technical practice and a private commodity governed by a means/end logic – summed up, again, in that supremely techno-managerial question – 'what works?' (Fielding and Moss, 2011, pp. 23-24).

Data and evidence displace debate and produce 'a mode of symbolic structuration of the community {of policy research} that evacuates the political core constituting it, namely dissensus' (Ranciere, 2010, p. 188) {my brackets}. This is a form of techno-politics within which technical expertise trumps questions of values and purpose. Concomitantly, critical policy research becomes increasingly 'irrelevant', and

unfundable. Critical scholars continue to address each other, in specialist conferences and journals, but go unheard by makers of policy.

The other matter of concern relates to the definition of educational research today and the way edu-businesses have sought to affect education policy through a reductive use of research and data sets, linked to the rise of 'big data', and the production of research *for* policy that inevitably simplifies policy problems and solutions in ways attractive to policy makers globally. This elides the complexities of the findings of educational research conducted in the academy and fails to acknowledge as well that policy is the 'authoritative allocation of values' ... that is, that politics are central to policy agendas, not simply research, however defined (Hogan, Sellar *et al.*, 2014,p. 30).

In all of this, here we confront another double (not simply that of management and cost), but also the value of research in terms of social and economic 'returns'. In a variety of ways research is now increasingly represented and legitimized as a form of investment. This in turn entails the direct connecting up of research, and therefore what research is 'worth' funding, to *problematisations* and the need for 'solutions' that are determined elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary public university is situated at the nexus of the state, economy and civil society, although the mix of imperatives, expectations and hopes that construct that nexus are in the flux. What it means to be a university, a lecturer, a researcher, a scholar are all changing as a result. The processes of neoliberalisation are reconfiguring the relationship between human sciences researchers and their research. That relationship is no longer articulated by curiosity, critique and enlightenment progressivism but instead by responsibility, investment and improvement. Our relationships to our discipline and to ourselves are remade as an ethics of enterprise. The university and the researcher are academic businesses striving to remain solvent, expand and grow and diversify in a field of complex and overlapping competitive relations – both with other HE institutions and increasingly with private sector providers of all sorts. Research truths are diffused and consumed, and increasingly are 'produced

and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses' (Foucault, 1980, p. 131-132) - we might name OECD, McKinsey, Pearson and the EEF.

Research in the human sciences is both a commodity, exchanged and sold within a priority driven funding regime, and increasingly, especially in areas like education, tied by these priorities and these funding mechanisms, to the management of the population and the maximisation of human capital resources in response to the demands of welfare costs and global economic competitiveness. Educational science has of late re-entered a phase in which the performance and 'ability' of students are conceptualised, on the one hand, through neuroscience and epigenetics (Rabinow and Rose, 2003) and in the other, through character, virtues and dispositions. This bio-educational complex operates at all levels in multi-facetted ways in the management of collective life. Just as was the case when population first emerged as a focus of state curiosity, brought into existence through the recording of information and statistical analysis. In the present the techniques of the human sciences, like data analytics, construct the population as an object of knowledge made susceptible to intervention. Educational researchers are also now designing and testing those interventions and their methods of delivery - this is one of a series of neoliberal doubles producing productivity and profit, performance enhancement and purposeful passivity, while whittling away the costs of traditional professionalism and the conduct of a proper politics of education. All of this entails the direct connecting up of research, and therefore what research is 'worth' funding, to state problems and the need for 'solutions' that 'work'. Researchers take rather than make these problems and at the same time are made neo-liberal academics.

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