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## How Ideological Differences Influence Pre-Service Teachers' Understandings of Educational Success

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*Abstract: This paper explores how popular ideological discourses within public policy are influencing the views and practices of pre-service teachers at a university in Melbourne. The research began by examining how educational success has been historically understood by individuals vis-à-vis government discourse. Three values and four corresponding ideological positions were used to create a theoretical framework. The researcher then surveyed a small cross-section of pre-service teachers to investigate how these values contributed to their understandings of educational success, and how these understandings were used to justify their receptions of neoliberal reforms in education. The data shows that democratic equality was the most influential value in participant understandings of educational success. However, attitudes and justifications towards the reforms diverged significantly, suggesting that these values were being positioned differently in discourse. The results were then critically analysed with reference to the theoretical framework. The paper concludes with a discussion of potential implications for policymaking in teacher education, and highlights the importance of preserving the intellectual autonomy of pre-service teachers as they enter the profession.*

**Keywords:** Pre-Service Teacher Education, Education Policy, Philosophy of Education, Foucault

### Introduction

Contemporary societies that have undergone globalisation are arguably more “cosmopolitan” and interculturally “competent” than ever before (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, pp. 174-175). This, however, does not lead to the legitimation of multiple value systems within education policy – on the contrary, there is mounting evidence that the reverse has occurred over the last two decades or so (Ball, 1990; Whitty, 1985; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The most influential doctrine to emerge in recent years has been that of economic competitiveness in an increasingly commoditised education market, spawning a neoliberal imaginary that interprets values through a positivist lens (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). This has fundamentally altered the general aims of education. Gone, argues Lyotard (1984, p. 49), is the “great task” of humanist “emancipation” and the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. In its place, a new brand of economic fundamentalism now dictates policymaking, with the goal of optimising contributions to the “performativity” of the social system (ibid., p. 48). These changes affect both individuals and institutions in disparate ways: while certain segments of society may profit greatly, others find themselves disenfranchised by this pervasive ideology (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

History tells us, however, that education cannot be reduced to a mere numbers game, and comprises more than just the “delivery” of skilled workers into the labour market (Daniels, Lauder & Porter, 2012, p. 2). Classical and pragmatist schools of thought recognise the importance of educating for democracy and social progress (Dewey, 1964). For democracy to work, citizens should be able to critique ideological narratives present in discourse today (Paquette, 2007). Teacher-citizens are thus also political actors: they must reconcile their beliefs with the other competing interests in a liberal democracy. How do aspiring teachers understand what ‘successful’ education is, and how does this shape their attitudes towards neoliberal policy reforms? To answer this question, this paper first constructs a theoretical framework that accounts for the ideological positions shaping value discourses within education policy. This framework informs the research component, a survey conducted among a group of pre-service teachers in the Faculty of Education at a leading Australian university. In the process, it explores how pre-service teachers define educational success, and analyses how multiple discourses and counter-discourses influence their definitions of educational success and their attitudes towards government policy.

## Literature Review

### Policy Texts as Value Discourses

While all educators teach for success, postmodernity has engendered an increasingly nebulous concept of what exactly constitutes successful education. The dominant strand of neoliberal policy analysis today uses a primarily empirical, evidence-based approach to determine what these aims are and how to best go about achieving them, as it is presumed to be values-neutral (Rizvi, 2007). Such a belief, however, is liable to be problematic because positivism alone cannot tell us what the social ends of education ought to be. As different types of truths exist, e.g. technical, ethical and aesthetic, “knowledge cannot be reduced to science” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 18). Education is also an art in addition to a science because it encompasses social goals: we teach not only how to be efficient, but also how to live (ibid.). I use the term ‘success’ in this paper with reference to these two ambitions present in the education system, bearing in mind that its definition is a site of constant negotiation.

Thus the search for a philosophy of education must involve dimensions beyond observable experience. The collapse of grand narratives in the postmodern era has made this search difficult, as there is no longer a widespread belief that knowledge moves towards totality, or that all of history is class struggle. This creates an epistemological “rootlessness” that denies the existence of universal truths, and particularly so for education, which necessarily involves people of diverse cultures and aptitudes (Paquette, 2007, p. 337). In a plural society, a tension exists between the individual and the state, and between the liberal and illiberal impulses in governance. Just as there is no one way to live, there can also be no single interpretation of success that pleases everyone. Language becomes a “game” of social context, says Lyotard (1984, p. 10): in official discourse, words acquire meaning because they are invested with the authority of the speaker. If all this holds true, then any attempt to devise a common value system informing educational success seems to be a futile endeavour.

Despite the “multiplicity of standpoints” from which discourses can be interpreted and analysed (Barthes, 1977, p. 80), a specific set of values is in fact embedded and selectively interpreted within education policy discourses (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The reproduction of a body of knowledge is not a neutral process; there is a hierarchisation of values by the establishment in its desire to produce “a certain kind of human being” in accord with its “fundamental principles” (Bloom, 1987, p. 26). These principles form an ideology: a

set of beliefs formed from “experience”, integrating “political” and “cultural” practices in the construction of reality (McLaren, 1988, p. 177).

My review of contemporary literature and policy texts has identified three presumably congruent yet sometimes competing values informing educational success, which I will use throughout this paper:

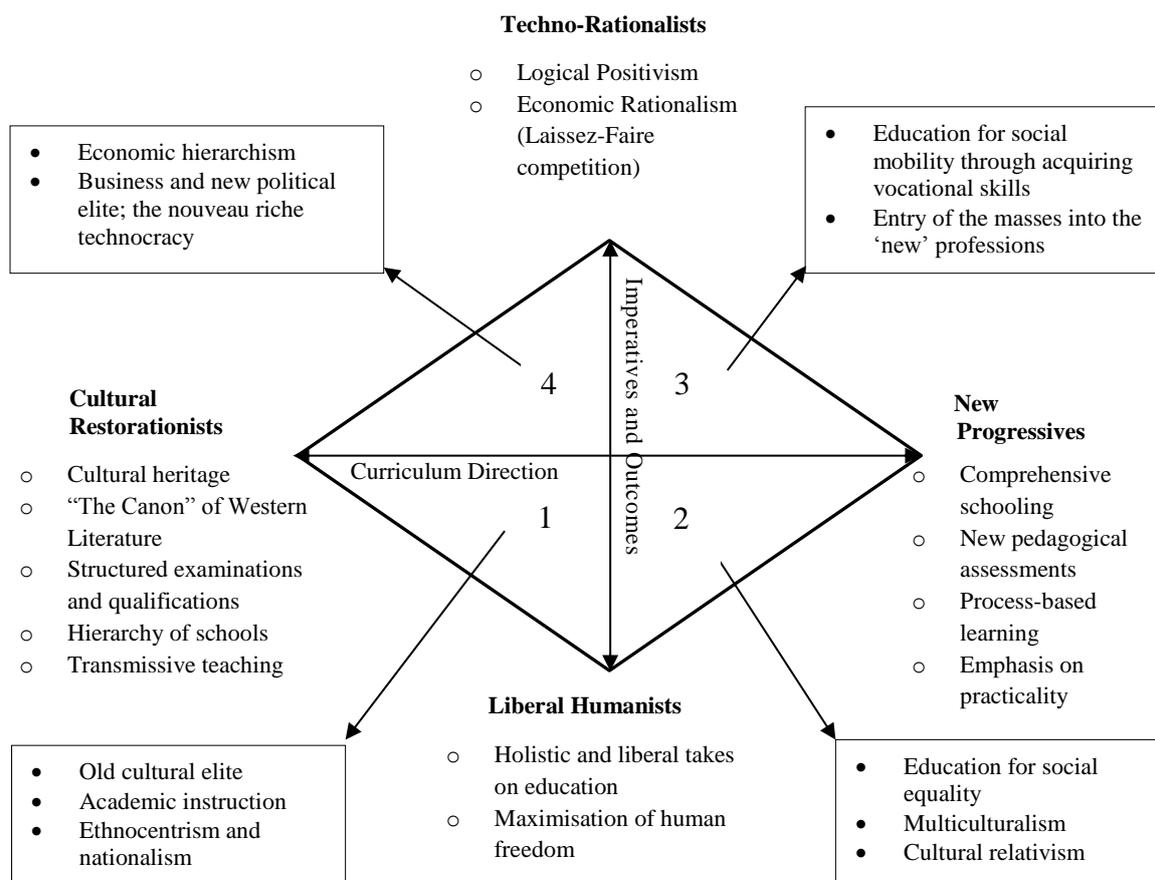
- *Social efficiency*, which is framed as making “young people fit for the economy” (Daniels, Lauder & Porter, 2012, p. 2). It can also be variously described as an ideology of ‘performativity’, ‘productivity’, and “doing your best” to achieve “excellence” (Australian Government, 2005, p. 4).
- *Democratic equality*, which springs from the need to “facilitate the development” of “critically informed” citizens through education, who are afforded equality of access and treatment in their sociopolitical participation under the democratic process (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 78).
- *Social justice* is popularly referenced in the Australian concept of the ‘fair go’: the pursuit of “the common good” compatible with a “just society” (Australian Government, 2005, p. 4). Social justice aims to remediate socioeconomic disadvantage through “strengthening” the structures that enable individuals “formal access” to public education (Paquette, 2007, p. 336; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 78).

The interpretative struggles described above demonstrate that these values that shape educational success do not possess definitive meanings across various discourses, nor can they be “divorced” from the wider value conflicts present in society today (Ball, 1994, p. 23; Ball, 1990). From a sociological perspective, this also suggests that educators do not enter the profession *tabula rasa*, as they as individuals bring their own assemblage of value interpretations to the classroom. It follows also that teachers “unavoidably” operate in the political sphere, as their line of work involves the “negotiation” of contradictory interpretations of values about the curriculum and educational objectives (Cochran-Smith, 2005, p. 181).

This literature review builds a theoretical framework by concentrating on how these three values were interpreted throughout different historical eras, from the Renaissance to contemporary neoliberalism. From this, four different ideological lenses emerge. They will then be used to explain how pre-service teacher embed values in their definitions of educational success, and why these understandings may clash with government discourse.

### **Ideological Positions in Education Policy Discourse**

I use a modified version of Ball’s (1990, p. 7, figure 1.2) model of influences and ideologies in education policymaking to visually assist the reader (see Figure 1 below). Here, I have identified four ideological stances within their respective quadrants, representing the intersections in discourse arising from a particular configuration of views on curriculum direction and educational imperatives. As will be explained, it is within these spaces that political actors engage in a “discursive struggle over competing [value] assemblages”, with the object of re-interpreting and re-articulating “the meaning and significance of key values” through the manipulation of ideological discourse (Rizvi & Lingard, 2011, p. 11).



**Figure 1: A Model of Ideological Influences in Educational Policy**

Here, the *x*-axis visualises curriculum direction as a continuum of two opposing interest groups that exercise influence on national curriculum: the *Cultural Restorationists* on the left, and the *New Progressives* on the right. This dispute takes on an epistemological dimension: are all types of knowledge equally valid in a specific sociocultural context and time? Educational success is therefore tied to these factors insofar as they shape curriculum content. The *y*-axis, on the other hand, illustrates the competing imperatives within education policymaking and their desired social outcomes in the wider world. These positions do not deal strictly with educational success in academic terms, but rather with its intended purpose in society. I broadly categorise imperatives according to whether they promote the maximisation of human agency in *Liberal Humanism*, or whether they advance an instrumental agenda of *Techno-Rationalism*. In the next section, I briefly sketch and explain how these positions and their corresponding value judgements have developed over time, borrowing from Foucault's archaeological method.

### Education through the Ages

Education has been a human endeavour since antiquity. The sweep of the history of ideas, however, will present educational discourse not so much as holy writ, but rather a palimpsest upon which values were shaped relative to their historical *episteme*, our systems of thought. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault (1994, xxii) introduces an *episteme* as the

“epistemological field” in which the discourses about knowledge “ground [their] positivity and thereby manifest a history...of [their] conditions of possibility”, i.e. the pre-conditions underlying the structure of knowledge particular to an epoch. Foucault’s thesis is that two “great discontinuities” are present in the history of Western thought. If this is correct, then it can be surmised that the character of education, being tied to the constitution of knowledge itself, would have undergone similar changes (ibid.). Accordingly, this analysis briefly chronicles the development of Western thought from the late Renaissance onward; studying in particular how values were positioned in each episteme, and the impact they had on education. While it is important to note that these ‘breaks’ with the previous ages are less cleanly delineated than once thought, what I will attempt to show here is that the remnants of the old ways of thinking still exert their influence upon our present education systems, and for good reason.

Liberal humanism has its roots in the Classical age, where it was believed that an education in the *studia humanitatis*, or liberal arts, would equip citizens with the knowledge and virtues to live the good life (Gray, 1963). To a limited degree we can consider these ancient virtues to be the forerunners of the three values that I have outlined above: one need only consult Aristotle’s *Organon* to draw parallels between his prototypical logic and contemporary pursuits of efficiency/rationality, Plato’s *Republic* on ‘what is [social] justice?’, and the Athenians on democratic equality. These virtues formed the basis of a “general education” and “integrated culture” in the Renaissance episteme (Gray, 1963, p. 502). A humanist education thus encompasses not only the full realisation of individual “potential” across all domains of human interests (not just the materially productive), but also a “universalised conception of culture and citizenship” to meet the communitarian needs of the people (Kellner, 2003, p. 55). Thus it became accepted that all men had a “natural right” to be educated for the benefit of society, because it was intrinsically edifying in ways beyond monetary quantification (Williams, 1962, p. 162).

The transition from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment inaugurated the neoclassical mode of thought. A newfound doctrine of formal reason allowed discrete identities to be ordered into an increasingly complex hierarchy, forming the basis of an ordering of all knowledge into various tables, ranging from the lowest entities to rarefied, divine laws (Foucault, 1994). Led by Diderot and the French *encyclopedistes*, the episteme of this period was fixed on the belief that all knowledge could be traced to a common origin and articulated through a “universal discourse” (Foucault, 1994, pp. 75-84). Similarly, formal education during this period was administered by the clergy in a top-down approach and reserved for society’s upper strata, keeping in line with the standards of the establishment. Influenced by this paradigm, the cultural restorationist curriculum favours academic “rigour”, authoritative interpretations of value assemblages, and presumes an idealised, “elitist” conception of European high culture (Whitty, 1985, p. 114; Kellner, 2003, pp. 54-55). This may explain why its proponents generally prefer unequivocal definitions of success, “explicit” transmissive teaching, and the assessment of educational outcomes in linear ways (Ball, 1994, p. 33-41).

Few would question that both these ideologies, as depicted in quadrant 1 (Fig. 1), remain important to our contemporary definitions of educational success. As asserted by Rizvi & Lingard (2010 p. 78), a humanist policy regards education as essential for individuals to “realise” their “full potential” and contribute to a “socially cohesive democratic community”. The allure of a national narrative of solidarity can be seen in the continued push for a “high quality, high equity” schooling system that assumedly serves the general interest of “all Australians” (Australian Government, 2012, pp. 3-15). Yet some may object to this humanist inscribing of progress upon an unproblematised, all-too-uniform slate of man and his interests, artificially bereft of the value conflicts that have plagued the clash of old and

new cultures. In fact, Foucault cautions against a totalising and ahistorical treatment of humanism, it being possessed of themes that have

*reappeared on several occasions over time, in European societies; these themes, always tied to value judgements, have obviously varied greatly in their content, as well as in the values they have preserved (1994, p. 44).*

It must therefore be acknowledged that our present knowledge nevertheless carries historical sediment with it, selectively interpreted to articulate the “metaphysical” virtues of the ideal man in society (Foucault, 1994, p. 348). His mythical appeal is still clearly seen today in our extolling of ‘timeless’ cultural virtues, located within the realms of literature and art/history.

However, this universalised pantheon of ideals seems inappropriate for an increasingly diverse demographic, as it hinges upon a one-dimensional interpretation of value discourses. The romantic spirit (or spectre) of the idealised person as the pinnacle of culture seems as obstructive to democracy as it remains an unattainable “fetish” (Kellner, 2003, pp. 54-55). Others contend that the rigidity of formal education embeds a hidden curriculum of “systemic rules” and privileged knowledge, allowing the traditional academic and cultural elite to reproduce their sociocultural capital, preserving their status as the ruling class (Whitty, 1985, p. 50; Bourdieu, 1984). This cycle cements what we know now to be potentially disenfranchising discourses on democratic equality and social justice throughout the establishment. But what, we may ask, is their exact relation – does knowledge become privileged by virtue of its ‘correctness’, its position in our episteme? Or is it privilege instead that legitimates what knowledge is?

New developments took place at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Building on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, man began to investigate himself as both an object *and* subject of knowledge. This created a second epistemic revolution that gave rise to the modern human sciences (Foucault, 1994). Modernism, notes Foucault (*ibid.*, p. 319), visualised the human being as an “empirico-transcendental double”: scientific knowledge is used in part to fulfil metaphysical ends, i.e. grand narratives. Teaching reproduces a version of these narratives. The field of education, henceforth envisioned as part of the human sciences, underwent a similar restructuring. This led to two important consequences. The first was the invention of a positivist analytic that linked the labour theory of value with technical skills necessary for industrial production, which effected a re-orientation of educational imperatives towards a techno-rationalist agenda. The second was the adoption of a new critical approach to anthropology: man, now aware of the limits of his knowledge that stem from particular socio-historico-economic structures, sought emancipation. By creating a version of truth from dialectical discourse, he opens up the established body of knowledge to critiques from alternative viewpoints (Foucault, 1994). Combined, these factors allow for a structural analysis of power and the founding of a political economy that changed forever the meaning of education.

Techno-rationalism defines educational success in terms of pragmatic labour skills and prospects; it is an instrumental meaning perceived through the lens of “industrial competency”, as was proposed by Dewey (1964, p. 119). The historical flourishing of vocational education in Australian schools draws in part on the “mythologised” values of hard work for societal progress, seeking to promote “enhanced participation” and social “mobility” for working-class groups through the acquisition of material wealth (Welch, 1996, p. 76). This credo is further supported by international bodies, as highlighted in an OECD report: the creation of a “well-trained and highly adaptable labour force” necessitates a “re-examination of the economic treatment of human resources and education”, i.e. educating to maximise the efficiency of human capital (OECD, 1993, p. 9). As reckoned by this theory, the state provision of educational resources ostensibly allows its population to exercise upward social mobility and make informed political choices to the benefit of democracy.

The new progressive movement is a blend of Marxian theory (i.e. class-based analyses of alienation) and pedagogical “innovations” that draw from Rousseau and Dewey (Ball, 1990, p. 6). Progressivists accuse the restorationist curriculum of “ignoring” the working-class and the cultural ‘other’ under a mantle of abstraction, instead preparing them for a life of routine labour and political dispossession, because they lack the tools to synthesise decentred knowledge with their sociocultural environment (Ball, 1994, p. 46). These sentiments are expressed in education policy through discourses on a culturally relativist curriculum that “rejects” the assumption of the “superiority of academic knowledge” over “everyday common-sense knowledge” (Young, 1973, p. 214). Additionally, a shift in emphasis from theoretical to practical knowledge encourages student participation in meaning making, as seen in learning-by-discovery and process-based assessments (Ball, 1990). It is then possible to separate progressives into two groups according to their programme. The sociocultural progressives, occupying quadrant 2 of the model (Fig. 1), are concerned with preserving the rich diversity of cultures and creating a more egalitarian society through comprehensive schooling (Ball, 1990). Their message is clear: justice and democracy are advanced by emancipation of labour and the abolishment of social class. On the other hand, the discourses of economic progressives in quadrant 3 emphasise the value of education as a creator of wealth. This material freedom in turn fosters democratic equality and social justice, and upward movement in life (Levin, 2007).

An unresolved tension remains in this modern episteme. As Foucault (1994, p. 367) notes, man constitutes the “domain of knowledge” in the human sciences: he has become both the thinking subject and the object of investigation. There is an irreducible, “quasi-transcendental” side to man, both in the ways knowledge is formulated and how humans apply that knowledge for their own ends (ibid., p. 250). If we move beyond technics, education cannot be described as an objective science – but neither would it be acceptable to think of it as purely subjective. There is a need to inquire more deeply into how our criteria for judgement are legitimate. Or in Lyotard’s (1984, p. 24) words, if I were to make a knowledge claim about educational success, “what proof is there that my proof is true?” That is indeed the central problem explored here. For better or worse, the postmodern condition rejects what were once widely accepted standards of truth, and yet it is difficult to see how value critiques and debates over educational policy can proceed without a theoretical consensus. Foucault (ibid., p. 387) concludes that the humanist concept of man as the centre of knowledge is but a quixotic “invention”, and one that possibly “near[s] its end” at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even today, there are signs that Foucault’s prediction was partially correct: while the empirical-transcendental impasse in the human sciences remains theoretically insoluble, policy attempts to circumvent it by eliminating the discourse of the subject.

There has been a positivist turn in education over the last few decades, but this has not necessarily resulted in greater individual freedom. Neoliberal discourses of social efficiency, as represented in quadrant 4 (Fig. 1), have transformed in the way educational success is not only thought about in Australia, but how they can be thought of. Advancements in the techno-scientific sphere have been accompanied by a postmodern material culture interested in “commodity forms”, where knowledge and education are forms of capital (Kenway et al., 2007, p. 5). The rise of the competition state signals the “crucial” role of governments in “maintaining and promoting economic competitiveness” within a global power hierarchy (Cerny, 2010, p. 6). Consequently, the discourses on social efficiency within the *Australia in the Asian Century* white paper mirrors these goals: a rise in educational qualifications “boosts productivity” through improved “technical” skills, supports “innovation” through the exploitation of “technological advances”, and ultimately facilitates the “accumulation of physical capital” (Australian Government, 2012, p. 135). These developments buttress the

argument that the values of education have become increasingly subject to the instrumental rationality of the economic sphere, and that humanism is in retreat.

The exigencies in such a move are not merely reflected on a national level; they stress Australia's competitiveness in a globalised economy and its positioning as one of the world's leading educational hubs. One visible outcome of the considerations of this so-called 'Asian Century' is the proliferation of high-stakes international testing. What drives these pro-competition initiatives is the "anxiety" generated by politicians and the media in their portrayal of the country's apparently declining performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) testing (Gorur & Wu, 2015, p. 647). Four out of five of the top performing nations hail from East Asia, leading to a marked interest in 'learning from the best' – and adopting some of their policies, despite the difficulties in transposition (Gorur & Wu, 2015, p. 649). The "ironing out" of fundamental disparities in culture, knowledge and pedagogy by reducing them to the "technical problem" of empirical quantification supposedly allows for a direct correlation between achievement in global league tables and educational success (Lauder et al., 2012, pp. 3-4).

This brand of discourse has been extended to the alleged inadequacy of Australian teacher education standards, as outlined in a recent Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) report. According to the data produced, an increasing number of entrants with "lower academic outcomes" have been admitted into teacher education courses, potentially compromising future teacher quality (TEMAG, 2014, p. 16). To rectify this, literacy and numeracy tests have been imposed for prospective teachers, in which they must score equivalent to the top 30 per cent of the general population to attain registration (TEMAG, 2014, pp. 16-17). Whether or not these measures are effective, an implicit suggestion is made that a teacher's future competence can be partly determined by a technical assessment involving facts and figures – a thought very much in line with the type of economic rationalisation described thus far. This goes hand in hand with the encouragement of a schooling market that claims to offer a superior quality, best-fit education to the consumer, which in their eyes becomes a form of product differentiation. Equally relevant too is the institutional reliance on the vision of a "deregulated" higher education market to provide the fiduciary motivations for said graduate quality to improve (TEMAG, 2014, p. 17). The subtext, as pointed out by Lauder et al. (2012, p. 1), is that the social imaginary now conceives of democratic equality mostly within the context of individual consumer liberties. Crystallised in policy discourses are elements of an ideology that holds free market mechanisms to be a panacea to multiple but tenuously related problems.

### Contemporary Issues for the Teacher

What I have attempted to illustrate in this review is the fracturing of the educational *telos* over the centuries and its resultant shift towards an interpretation of values consistent with the neoliberal ideology depicted in quadrant 4 (Fig. 1). The negative ramifications of these changes have been the subject of extensive studies in educational research, e.g. (Campbell, Proctor & Sherington, 2009; Shepherd, 2015). In short, the hierarchisation of knowledge and human capital according to market worth has led to a palpable widening of social inequalities and a possible democratic deficit, as teachers are finding themselves "more accountable" for implementing top-down policies in which they have little input (Welch, 1996, p. 8).

While the other three ideological positions in quadrants 1, 2 and 3 may be diminished, they still retain their influences (Fig. 1). Teacher-intellectuals work within a confluence – sometimes a collision – of these ideologies. For instance, senior teachers, notes Ball (1994, p.

58), increasingly find themselves “caught between” the ideals of education and the reality of budgetary “constraints”. Which positions will prospective teachers adopt in interpreting the three values of educational success, and what new understandings can we draw from this? These are the questions that this study seeks to address.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate what differences in value systems exist between participant and policy definitions of educational success, using the four ideological positions developed as a theoretical lens to frame their responses. The secondary purpose was to explain how these differences, if they exist, affect pre-service teachers’ views on government reforms. The research questions were:

- How are the three values of social efficiency, democratic equality and social justice interpreted in pre-service teachers’ definitions of educational success?
- How do ideological positions influence the value interpretations above, and thus participant reception of reforms?

To this end, an open-ended survey was conducted amongst a group of pre-service teachers undertaking an initial teacher education qualification at a leading Australian University. First, a pre-survey task was administered to familiarise participants with the three values, stimulate reflection on how these values were important to them, and briefly acquaint them with recent policy reforms. Then, the survey was conducted. The survey instrument was devised as follows:

- Question one: What does educational success mean to you? Please explain carefully the reasons behind your understandings.
- Question two: Do you agree that educational policy increasingly reflects the demands of the knowledge economy and/or increasing globalisation?
- Question three (if answer to above question is ‘yes’):  
If you view this trend positively, why? And how you will accommodate these changes in your classroom? If you view it negatively, why? Will you accommodate them anyway?

This qualitative survey design was developed to integrate the research aims with the perspectives in the literature review. Ravitch and Carl’s (2016, p. 174) points for effective survey design were adhered to, including the use of a “substantive introduction” to guide participants and making sure that the flow of questions align logically. Open-ended survey questions allow for framing the responses with a target scope while still capturing the “authenticity, richness, depth of responses and candour” which are the “hallmarks” of qualitative data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 255). This allows for exploration of participant comments “beyond” the capabilities of closed-ended methods (Creswell, 2008, p. 228).

Some limitations to this study exist due to its small-scale nature. Instead of prioritising generalizability common to quantitative research, the small sample size (n=20) meant that the goal was rather to reach a “complex and multiperspectival understanding” that directly addresses the research questions (Ravitch and Carl, 2016, p. 138). As a purely empirical paradigm can reveal only technical truths, I also evaluated the diverse experiences of pre-service teachers from an exploratory perspective. Here, the reasons supplied by the participants to justify their views become the target of inquiry themselves. Specifically, I looked to generate historically-rooted explanations of how participants interpret established social phenomena in discourse – revealing its “implicit” and potentially “unconscious”

aspects – rather than seeking to quantify the phenomenon itself (Flick, 2014, p. 6). Validity in this qualitative study, especially its descriptive, interpretive and evaluative aspects, was carefully considered. Key clauses were selected and reproduced verbatim from the responses, and aggregated into tables. Evaluation is a more subjective task, and must involve paying “careful attention” to language and the way meaning is “reflected”, as well as the researcher’s own inevitable biases (Ravitch and Carl, 2016, p. 191). To increase validity, interpretations and evaluations were double-checked and verified by three senior researchers at a Group of Eight university.

### **Sampling Methods and Conduct of Survey**

The method used was purposive sampling. Participant demographics were restricted to students (n=20) undertaking a Bachelors of Education (first-years excluded to increase validity) or Masters of Teaching degree at the university. As these are initial teacher education programs, no participant possessed prior experience working as a qualified teacher. Most participants (n=17) fell into the 19 to 29 age bracket, while the remaining three postgraduates were more mature.

This study was conducted in a publicly accessed student lounge within the faculty of education building at the university. Potential participants were approached as opportunity allowed and requested to complete a two-part anonymous paper survey. They were briefed first, and then allowed as much time as necessary to organise their thoughts and produce a detailed response. Upon completion of the survey, participants folded up their responses and inserted them into a sealed box. Because this small-scale qualitative research project used non-probability sampling with a lower number of participants, it is expected that the results are ungeneralisable to the wider population (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

### **Data Analysis**

Data collected from the second open-ended section was analysed using thematic identification, which is a method that aggregates “similar codes” to form “major ideas” in the database (Creswell, 2008, p. 256). As the sample size was small, data coding was accomplished by hand. A further process of thematic layering was conducted, allowing greater insight into the responses by working upwards towards broader and more complex levels of abstraction (Creswell, 2008, p. 259). The objective of this process is to eventually draw links between the ideological positions described theoretical framework of the study and the multiple code terms that the research is likely to generate. Once this was complete, a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis was used to unpack how participants as “historical subjects” construct and position their knowledge claims relative to establishment discourse (Willig, 2014, p. 345). As propounded by Willig (*ibid.*, p. 344), this involved questioning the emergent “assumptions” that appear to undergird what is being said.

### **Results**

The data collected from the survey was analysed using the data analysis process previously outlined. The results of question one in the survey have been compiled in table 1, classified according to themes (value orientation), frequency, and examples of participant responses. Some responses may be classified under more than one theme.

Value orientation	Frequency	Example of responses
<b>Democratic equality</b>	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Real world’ understandings</li> <li>• Wide range of interests catered for in the curriculum</li> <li>• Acquiring a love of learning through relevant content</li> <li>• Self-improvement in broad areas of knowledge</li> <li>• Developing critical skills and thinking</li> <li>• ‘True learning’ as opposed to covering content</li> <li>• Setting and meeting personal mastery goals for students</li> <li>• Exceeding student’s own unique and fair expectations</li> <li>• Creativity</li> </ul>
<b>Social efficiency</b>	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Real world’ understandings</li> <li>• General skills, abilities and competencies e.g. logical problem solving</li> <li>• Effective preparation for the working world</li> <li>• Success means ‘moving forward’ in life</li> <li>• Gaining applied skills</li> <li>• Understanding curriculum content</li> <li>• Academic achievement is a useful gauge [of success]</li> </ul>
<b>Social justice</b>	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working towards a more humane society</li> <li>• Making a change in the world</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Major categories of educational success in question one**

The responses to question two have been compiled in table 2. Nearly all participants responded in the affirmative. The responses to question three in the survey have been compiled in table 3, classified according to reception (whether respondents agreed with policy shifts), what ideological position was adopted in support of which value, and examples of participant responses.

Response	Frequency
<b>Yes</b>	17
<b>No</b>	2
<b>Unsure/Not answered</b>	1

**Table 2: Does educational policy increasingly reflect the demands of the knowledge economy and/or increasing globalisation?**

Reception	Ideological position	Value expressed	Example of responses
<b>Agree</b>	Liberal Humanist	Democratic equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education will be more open and free</li> <li>• Important for students to learn about a broad range of subjects</li> <li>• Will encourage students to think about all aspects of a topic</li> </ul>
<b>Agree</b>	Economic Progressive	Social efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We should teach what students will need in the future</li> <li>• To prevent stagnation for the knowledge economy and indeed the next generation, innovation should be nurtured when practical</li> </ul>
<b>Agree</b>	Neoliberal	Social efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equips [students] to bring more capital as individuals in society</li> <li>• Provides students with the necessary capital for success</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's what I'm told to do and it's easier that way</li> <li>• Somewhat good for employability and understanding global changes</li> </ul>
<b>Disagree</b>	Liberal Humanist	Democratic equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I see it as limiting...learning and teaching becomes restricted by external constraints</li> <li>• [Policy shifts] dismisses other domains such as the arts and educational freedom</li> <li>• This process has gone out of control...because it poses a huge vacuum between student satisfaction and academic goals</li> </ul>
<b>Disagree</b>	Economic Progressive	Social efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The knowledge economy puts too much favour towards academic knowledge, when large amounts of students will end up in working in other sectors</li> </ul>
<b>Disagree</b>	Sociocultural Progressive	Social justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compromises disadvantaged students</li> <li>• System is over-competitive</li> <li>• Useless to compare our performance with a 'high performing' country like South Korea because of sociocultural differences</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Major attitudes towards education policy shifts and ideological positions in question three**

**Observations for Question One (Table 1)**

Democratic equality was the value most influential in participant understandings of educational success, with fifteen out of twenty-eight clauses cited in response to question 1. Two closely related but distinct imperatives guided this definition. The first imperative is the maximisation of liberty, conceived with regards to the individual's own "personal mastery goals" (Table 1). The second imperative is tied to a traditional scholasticism that favours the cultivation of a "love of learning" and the implementation of a curriculum that supports the "broad areas of knowledge". This can arguably be seen to benefit the "wide range" of human interests that exist today.

The value of social efficiency was appealed to eleven times. Participants who conceptualised a performative form of educational success did so in terms of outcomes that promoted employability, e.g. the acquisition of "applied skills" in "preparation" for work or an understanding of "curriculum content". A couple of participants upheld the importance of academic achievement as a "useful gauge" of educational success, implying that its definition is quantifiable through standardised testing.

Remarkably, social justice received only two mentions from the participants. Advocating for positive change, they saw the creation of a "more humane society" as something that an education system should aspire to. Although this goal can be interpreted rather loosely, the sentiments expressed by the participants indicate that a successful education system prioritises the needs of students from disadvantaged circumstances over the need to maximise competitiveness.

**Observations for Questions Two and Three (Tables 2 and 3)**

It was seen from the responses to questions two and three that majority of participants possessed at least a rudimentary understanding of the processes of globalisation and the emerging knowledge economy. Seventeen out of twenty respondents to question two agreed that educational policy was moving in this direction (Table 2). The two respondents who

disagreed with the proposition were critical of Australia's putatively sluggish reaction to the new global realities.

Significant polarisation was observed in the responses to question three, with approximately half of the participants expressing approval of the policy reforms, and the other half expressing varying levels of disagreement (Table 3). These divisions can be explained as the result of the different ideological lenses shaping participants' value systems and their definitions of educational success. All responses that adopted the language of performative neoliberal discourse regarded the policy shifts positively. By linking the value of social efficiency as essential to success in the knowledge economy, these participants privileged individual forms of "capital". Conversely, responses that reflected a cultural progressive ideology censured the changes. They stressed that the value of social justice would be "compromised" in an "over-competitive" system, with one participant even suggesting that sociocultural peculiarities made international comparisons of educational performance futile.

I would like to draw attention to the occasionally contradictory understandings in the way values were interpreted vis-à-vis policy by some respondents. A holistic view of educational success was evident in the majority of responses, implying that liberal humanism was being consciously used as an interpretive lens. While democratic values dominated their justifications, there seems to be a sharp disagreement in Table 3 on whether these shifts in education policy are a boon ("education will be more open and free") or a bane (fears that policy will be dismissive of "educational freedom"). This phenomenon can be attributed either to a misunderstanding of the effects of policy, or a hidden undercurrent of ideological discourse that influences participant reasoning. As previously covered, it is plausible that some respondents envisaged democratic 'autonomy' in free-market libertarian terms, while others conceptualised it as the freedom to engage in critical debate.

Progressive themes were articulated in two distinct ways. Rationalist and individualistic paradigms of education journeys dominated participants' interpretations of educational success, and were expressed through phrases such as "moving forward in life" – the language of personal growth rather than an egalitarian spirit (Table 1). Similarly, participants who backed economic progressivism viewed educational capital as a "practical" prerequisite for national progress (Table 3). On the other hand, sociocultural progressivism was underrepresented throughout the survey responses, suggesting that respondents were more concerned with raising overall performance than with 'bridging the gap'.

Finally, two responses indicated possible apathy towards a loss of teacher autonomy, e.g. "it's what I'm told to do and it's easier that way", and it is worth pondering why this is the case (Table 3). Further research is required to establish whether this can be attributed to their attempts to remain apolitical, or whether they sincerely believe that a teacher's responsibility is to merely implement and not critique policymaking.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored the various ideological constructs that influence how educational success has been understood in public policy and by pre-service teachers. My conclusion will now draw upon the theories detailed in the literature review to analyse the implications of this study. The results suggest that the concept of educational success cannot be reduced to a definitive interpretation, and is instead subject to a range of subjective and often contrasting opinions, betraying a deeper gulf in participants' understandings of discourse. At the same time, I acknowledge the limitations of my analysis: there are always

differences between words interpreted through the researcher's lenses, and what the participants really intend to say.

Participants who approved of the neoliberal reforms couched their responses largely using the buzzwords of "real-world understandings" and "critical thinking" (Table 1). The techno-rationalist imperative was evident when these terms were operationalised together with language that stipulated an end, e.g. a pathway to career success at the end of students' educational journeys. Another divergent interpretation emerging from the responses was one of an open and free education, which highlights a possible belief in the ability of the free-market system to deliver a democratic, broad-ranging education system. Somewhat paradoxical however was the acceptance of creativity and critical thinking by some participants as reconcilable with instrumental ends, e.g. academic achievement, as the sole pursuit of pragmatic ends inherently negates the type of intellectual freedom that 'creativity' implies. As Giroux warns (1988, pp. 122-123), reifying scientific methodology as a concrete end forecloses the possibility of other ends, becoming a self-justifying ideology in its own right, thus arguably denying "the very need for critical thinking". And so, the potential danger of neoliberal policy lies in its attenuation of knowledge to a series of technical procedures and assumptions that limits the intellectual autonomy of classroom teachers.

It is precisely these pro-democratic objections that were expressed by participants who disapproved of the policy reforms. The liberal humanist perspective was illustrated by responses that felt that teaching for educational success also entailed catering to a broad range of interests, among other goals that prove impossible to quantify. Therefore, there was also a discrediting of techno-rationalism as a method that is unfit for purpose. For example, the rhetoric of evidence-based teacher evaluation contains an ideological (and potentially irrational) subscription to normative measures of aptitude as adequate for a profession that resists above all the type of instrumental rationality that is characteristic of late-industrialism. The calling of the educator can only be painted in the broad strokes of intellectual and social progress. To devise a procrustean model of skills and competencies to which the teacher is attached, therefore, is analogous to drawing boundaries on the types of knowledge worth bringing into the classroom. This undermines the principles of a few disciplines, such as autonomy in the creative arts, wherein truth is subjective.

What are we to make of these divisions? It is possible to side with Foucault in his later work (1972, p. 227) by viewing education as the "social appropriation" of discourse, building "great edifices" that "distribute speakers" among its various categories and uses, practicing "verbal rituals" that draw the "battle-lines" of political conflict. Thus, it is appreciated that 'knowledge' as justified true belief is articulated and reproduced through a controlling medium – albeit one that is often challenged, depending on what political allegiances one holds. And apart from the study of power relations, it is clear too that a range of other methodologies, such as ethnography, can be adopted to examine these interpretive variations and inform further research. But one may also wonder if social differences alone can adequately explain these phenomena, or whether they are important yet exteriorised manifestations of a cardinal divide in the constitution of our knowledge. After all, it was the shattering of the classical episteme that precipitated the modern fields of anthropology, wherein man could propose structures that govern his subjective experiences of life, e.g. race, class and culture (Foucault, 1994).

If this is the case, it would be useful to analyse why the neoliberal system of thought has taken hold today, given its controversial reception. The most plausible explanation, as put forward by Paquette (2007, p. 340), is that the "poststructuralist flux" has allowed for "profound" ethical and curricular inter-subjectivity between the "radical individualism" of the techno-rational competition state, and the "communitarian" cultural relativism of the progressives. Meanwhile, empiricism, or experiential knowledge of means and ends, now

dominates plans of action through its universal quantifiability. Fuelled by a “mistrust” of human subjectivity, “data and numbers” become “central” to this new mode of governance (Lingard et al., 2013, pp. 541-544). Consequently, “meritocratic” standardised testing is cast instead as being fair for all, despite its role in creating a vicious circle of resource deficit among students (Paquette, 2007, p. 349). Another potential detriment is that if this reasoning provides the stimulus for some of the respondents to view social justice as a government responsibility, then the resultant centralisation of authority also limits individuals’ freedom to make their own moral judgements.

The problem for education here is ultimately twofold: the very nature of knowledge is architectonic; it has been built up over centuries and remains structurally wedded to powerful institutions that not only legitimate its truth, but are in themselves historical preconditions for the possibility of knowledge (Foucault, 1972). Thus the foundations of knowledge are never truly egalitarian but rather hierarchal; it privileges a reading of values that is seen as more correct in a certain context and in a particular episteme. Yet democracy wants knowledge to be free and subject to open examination, not imposed on by an authoritarian breed of rationality. With this in mind, it seems appropriate for policymakers to seriously consider the objections raised by the participants of this study and to address them in a transparent way. Reciprocal dialogue should be fostered between the state and the academy if public policy is to be seen as more than just a one-way street. Prospective teachers must therefore be encouraged in their university courses to develop and question their positions on educational success vis-à-vis government policies so that they can meet their intellectual responsibilities. By welcoming them to the debate, they develop a fuller understanding of the hidden discourses surrounding educational success. If we regard in the Western tradition that knowledge arises out of dialectical reason, then the spirit of free and open critique must be preserved among our future educators.

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