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Education policy beyond the 'Big Society': the paradox of neoliberal governmentality under the
Coalition government

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Abstract: Prior to the 2010 general election the 'Big Society' was the major political narrative created and sustained by the Conservative party under David Cameron. The Big Society as a narrative was formulated to become an approach to governance that would fix Broken-Britain and repair the nation's economy and public services. This type of overarching political narrative was not new. In fact, the 'Big Society' in many ways can be viewed as both the response to New Labour's 'Third Way' and a continuation of the political rebranding initiated by New Labour.

The purpose of this paper is to contextualise this argument in relation to education policy and education reform under the Coalition government. The reason for focusing solely upon the field of education refers to the growing connection between education as both a social and also an economic policy priority. Secondly, the paper makes the argument that the 'Big Society' much as the 'Third Way' under New Labour, is a product of neoliberal governmentality. Finally, attention turns towards conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the policy discourse around education reform under the Coalition. The data sample for this analysis consisted of fourteen political speeches made by policy-makers and politicians that speak for the Coalition on education reform.

The analysis uncovers several layers of the political discourse in relation to education reform. Alongside this illustration of the construction of political discourse the paper draws attention to some of the paradoxes and contradictions present within neoliberal governmentality. The concepts of 'freedom' and 'responsibility' which are central to the 'Big Society' narrative were also key aspects of the Coalition's education reform agenda. However, the dichotomy between autonomy and accountability is presented as paradoxical when transmitted towards policy intentions and policy outcomes.

Keywords: Big Society, Education Policy, Neoliberalism, Governmentality, Critical Discourse Analysis

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Introduction

Prior to the 2010 general election the Big Society was the major political narrative created and sustained by the Conservative party under the leadership of David Cameron (Norman, 2010). The Big Society narrative represented the response by the Conservatives to mend financially Broken Britain and repair and reform Britain's Broken Society (Evans, 2011). The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between the overarching political narrative of the Big Society and the education policy reforms introduced and implemented under the Coalition.

The focus upon the field of education policy is twofold. Firstly, the Big Society narrative implies a dual focus on both providing a solution to the economic problems facing the country as well as an answer for the deep rooted social issues manifest in contemporary society (Norman, 2010). This viewpoint is based on the idea that Big Society will replace Big Government (Bochel, 2011) and as Taylor-Gooby and Stoker (2011) assert, "[the Big Society] endorses the high Tory romanticism of a more organic social order in which individuals contribute to a common good through their own direct efforts" (p.11). Secondly, since the wave of Thatcherism throughout the 1980s the connection between economic policy and education policy has become much more pronounced (Wright, 2012). As a result, education policy is linked to both its effect on social mobility and social justice but also on its impact on the nation's economy (Lingard & Sellar, 2012).

According to the former Secretary of State for Education (SoS), Michael Gove (2015) the legacy of the Big Society is most apparent in the education policies of the Coalition, specifically the introduction and expansion of the Free Schools programme (see also Norman, 2010; Goodwin, 2011; Hatcher, 2011). With this in mind, the paper focuses upon education reform and education policy over the period of the last five years. The paper critically analyses the political discourse around education reform espoused by the policy-makers and politicians responsible for education over the period of the Coalition government's tenure in power. This type of study is important because it illuminates, the often underlying aspects, of the stated intentions of politicians. The analysis focuses predominantly upon the first three years of the Coalition. Attention is paid to these years due to the intensity of the reforms being pursued and implemented at that period of time (see Wright, 2012). The data sample was subjected to iterative cycles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) following the methodological framework of Jager and Maier (2009). Throughout the period of analysis a collection of theoretical memos (Charmaz, 1983) were created in order to help manage and synthesise the vast amounts of data.

The paper is primarily structured into four sections, following this brief introduction the paper will map out in more detail the Coalitions approach to education reform with a brief discussion of the flagship policies implemented over the Parliament. The second section examines how these policies and reforms link into the narrative of the Big Society before comparing these policy directions with the New Labour approach to education and the impact of the Third Way. This comparison of governance leads into the penultimate section of the paper which highlights both the construction of political discourse and the differences between the tone and style adopted. It is argued here that the broad themes of the education reforms remain fairly consistent across the different political parties and the narratives of the Third Way and the Big Society simply serve to rebrand the neoliberal policy agenda (see Fairclough, 2000). The final section, before a conclusion is provided, focuses upon the central paradox of neoliberal governmentality; the relationship between freedom and responsibility which is articulated throughout political discourse over the Coalitions political era.

Education policy under the Coalition

The continual tide of neoliberalism as a framework for social and economic policy, initiated under Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s and then perpetuated and entrenched under John Major and Tony Blair, demonstrates both the prevailing strength of the neoliberal argument as well as the distinct absence of a credible alternative that commands both political and economic confidence (Steadman-Jones, 2012). However, this point is not to say that neoliberalism is uncontested and indeed not without its own problems and contradictions (quite the opposite). In fact, neoliberalism is fraught with unintended consequences, paradoxes and much opposition. As Evans (2011) argues, Thatcherism was divisive, toxic *but* politically *successful*. This redrawing of the centre ground of British politics and opinion compelled the Labour party to adapt and become a New Labour. The resulting success of New Labour and the thirteen years in power built on the further embrace of neoliberal ideals and policies rather ironically meant that the original architects of the neoliberal agenda in the 1980s, the Conservatives, themselves had to 'change to win'.

While New Labour started with much promise in 1997 the period of power from 2005 to 2010 was characterised by a decreasing lack of trust in politicians. From expense scandals, which disengaged voters from politics, to a global economic crisis (which many could argue was a result of neoliberal ideals) helped encourage an era of new politics (King, 2011). The birth of the Coalition government between the Conservatives as the lead party, and the Liberal Democrats in support was premised on the need to fix the economy and eradicate the deficit. Therefore, the close management of public finances and public spending signalled a shift away from the policies of New Labour which encompassed "steeply rising investment" throughout their time in power (Goodwin, 2011, p.408).

Goodwin (2011) argues that this year on year increase in investment prevented any formation of resistance against the more radical components of the (New Labour) reform agenda. Goodwin (2011) makes the point that the economic context (when the Coalition assumed office) is less conducive for the Coalition to continue the New Labour approach to education policy. As such the Coalition's education reforms are characterised by the notion of getting 'more for less'. What follows outlines the main components of the Coalition's reforms in the field of education.

Prior to the 2010 election the flagship education policies of the Conservative party revolved around a large-scale expansion of the Academies programme as well as the introduction of Swedish style Free Schools (Pike, 2010; Hatcher, 2011; Hope, 2012). In addition to these structural reforms the Conservatives sought to introduce greater choice, freedom and localism to the way in which schools operated and were held accountable to their parents and pupils (Hope, 2012). These themes of decentralisation, pushing power down into the hands of people in local communities, chime with the concepts and overall philosophy underpinning the Big Society (Evans, 2011). However, the central tension between these reforms and the Big Society narrative refers to the bind between economic policy and social policy (Norman, 2010). In order to fund the expansion of academy schools and introduce new Free Schools into the State sector the Department for Education (DfE) would need to offset the cost for such policies through exercising spending restraint and making efficiency savings (or cuts) to other areas of education spending. It is the action and the decisions taken here that set the Conservatives apart ideologically with their Liberal Democrat partners and the Labour Party of Ed Miliband.

Briefly, the former SoS for Education, Michael Gove, cut the running costs of the DfE by around 50% (Gove, 2015). Furthermore, under his leadership decisions were made to scrap the Building Schools for the Future programme (BSF), scale back the School Sports Partnership programme (SSPs) and abolish the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) (see Jones & Hatcher, 2011). While there were obviously other initiatives and programmes 'cut', or indeed scaled back, the aforementioned decisions represent both the headline policy changes and the areas where the ideological differences between the political parties can be illustrated and extrapolated most vehemently. It is also worth noting that the Coalition agreement on education between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats also outlined a commitment to a 2.5 billion pound Pupil Premium for disadvantaged children, this was a flagship policy for the Liberal Democrats and a so-called 'red line' to any agreement in Coalition talks between political parties after the May 2010 general election (HM Government, 2010; Laws, 2010). While it is clear that the pace of reform in the field of education does not show any signs of slowing, the structural reforms to schools in this Parliament represent both the key policy shifts made under the Coalition as well as a clear ideological difference

between all three main parties. It is also the case that the reforms made to introduce Free Schools and further expand the Academies programme demonstrate the philosophy of the Big Society most acutely in respect of actual policy (Lingard & Sellar, 2012; Wright, 2012; Gove, 2015).

Neoliberal governmentality: the Third Way and the Big Society

This section analyses aspects of the political discourse in an attempt to draw comparisons between the approach to governance under New Labour and their focus upon joined-up governance with the Big Society philosophy of the Conservatives which is premised on doing more for less. It is argued that these overarching political narratives present a neutralised, voter friendly perception of the politician's intentions and directions, rather than the stark ideological commitments made towards achieving their 'good society'.

A central theme of both New Labour's reforms and those pursued by the Coalition has been the focus upon localism and devolution of power (Hope, 2012). This idea is born out of a view in which local government, local authorities and localised bureaucracy actually prevent local teachers and local school leaders, parents and students from improving education and innovating practice and delivery (Norman, 2010; Hope, 2012). This presents in itself an interesting bind for localism, as in the minds of policymakers across both New Labour and the Coalition, teachers, parents and school leaders represent localism in education policy rather than local education authorities (LEAs) and local government representatives. As this quote makes clear, under an academised system the role of LEAs will change:

"I've been asked many times about the role of local authorities in a more autonomous school system, particularly as the number of academies continues to grow. We are clear that local authorities have a crucial role to play - as champions of children and parents, to ensure the school system works for every family; using their democratic mandate to challenge underperformance; and to ensure fair access to all schools for every child through the admissions system. The Secretary of State has established a ministerial advisory group with representatives from local government and education to work through what this means in practice - that local authorities would take action if there are concerns about the performance of any school in the area, using their intervention powers to act early to secure improvement in their own maintained schools."

(Gibb, 2011)

The message here is that LEAs will remain but in a somewhat lesser capacity. Essentially under the policies of the Third Way and the Big Society LEAs have been forced into adopting an administrative role whereby they monitor and then subsequently report back to Whitehall on the practices and actions of schools within their community. This now entrenched reform has created the space for policy opponents to formulate a resistance against these reforms based upon the erosion of local democratic oversight and schools (academies) becoming self-interested and uncooperative with other local schools. However, politicians seek to present a rather different policy outcome:

“Even more impressive than what individual academies are doing by themselves is what they’re achieving through cooperation. And this is a critical point. Because the critics warned these new schools would be soulless, selfish islands of elitism. Fragmented. Isolated. Even aggressive. In fact, this cynical prediction couldn’t be further from the truth. Heads, teachers, governing bodies, showed more commitment, more devotion, and a greater sense of moral purpose than the critics gave them credit for. Academies are not islands unto themselves; instead, what we’ve witnessed is an outpouring of desire to help others”

(Gove, 2012a)

Policymakers assert that the removal of the metaphorical shackles has in fact had the opposite effect to the concerns raised by those opposed to academisation and the neoliberal reform agenda. Instead the argument is made that ‘freedom’ and ‘autonomy’ have made schools more outward looking and innovative in terms of the curriculum and the way they provide education and resources locally. These neoliberal themes of freedom with responsibility, autonomy with accountability, did not just arrive with the Third Way and extend with the Big Society:

“...the seeds of our reforms go back decades. The first City Technology Colleges were set up in 1988 - and indeed we are standing in one of the very first. These all-ability comprehensives enjoyed much more autonomy than other schools, and headteachers exercised their new-found freedom to extraordinary effect. Despite being overwhelmingly located in poorer areas, the CTCs achieved - and continue to achieve - great results: the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in CTCs who earned five or more good GCSEs at grades A* to C is more than twice as high in CTCs as it is for all maintained mainstream schools. Some of the autonomy enjoyed by schools like the CTCs, and indeed grant-maintained schools, was eroded after 1997. But the best minds in the last Government knew that was a mistake...”

(Gove, 2012b)

This emphasis was carried over from the New Right governments of Thatcher and Major (Steadman-Jones, 2012). The neoliberal hegemony (Wright, 2012) is the perpetual driver of contemporary education reforms. However, whereas the political and economic framework remains largely the same, the language and the way politicians present their ideological approach to governance differs (see Fairclough, 2000; Mulderrig, 2011). The above extract of political discourse illustrated the policy linkage across administrations, much like the sample below, crucially however is the focus upon both policy and political validation:

“Seeing the success of CTCs, the last government took the principle of autonomy forward under its academies programme. The scheme took chronically failing schools away from Local Authorities and placed them under the wing of a sponsor, who was given the freedom and flexibility to implement real change.”

(Gove, 2011a)

One might suspect that policymakers would seek validation and approval for their policies and their reforms in order for them to receive credit and ultimately votes. The really interesting point however, is that within this political discourse there is an underlying sense that the need for validation and approval is not just restricted to the basic arguments of increasing the number of academies, or in fact building upon previous government’s reforms, it lies in the need to reaffirm the principles of neoliberal governance and neoliberal ideals. The following section will analyse the

construction of the discourse more closely and present examples of policymakers and politicians reinforcing the neoliberal hegemony that dictates social and economic policy reform agendas.

Neoliberal language: the construction of political discourse

Lingard and Sellar (2012) describe David Cameron's Conservatism as "Thatcherism with a human face" (p.49). The basic tenant of their argument relates to the masking of what is essentially a continuation of the New Right policies of the 1980s under the auspice of compassion and social justice. This demonstrates the Conservatives ability to learn from New Labour who effectively adopted and extended the policies of the New Right alongside an agenda of partnership, social equality, aspiration and community renewal (Fairclough, 2000; Mulderrig, 2011). The Big Society encapsulated these same aspects and themes but did so in such a way as to attack the previous system. The following two data samples illustrate this point and illuminate the manner in which the Conservatives attacked New Labour and the Third Way approach to governance providing them the opportunity to establish the philosophy of the Big Society as a means by which these problems and issues could be overcome:

"Our education system continues to be characterised by inequality **(1)**. The chances of a child who is eligible for free school meals getting five good GCSEs including English and Maths are less than one third of those for children from better-off families **(2)**. 42 per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals did not achieve a single GCSE above a grade D in 2008. More pupils from Eton went to Oxford or Cambridge last year than from the entire cohort of the 80,000 students eligible for free schools meals **(3)**. This is a dreadful situation which no government should be prepared to tolerate. Not only does this let down hundreds of thousands of bright children who should have the opportunity to go to excellent schools and to swim in the pool of knowledge that pupils from the better off families take for granted, it will also impair all of our economic and cultural futures **(4)**"

(Gibb, 2010)

"The scars of inequality run deep. We live in a profoundly unequal society **(1)**. More than almost any developed nation ours is a country in which your parentage dictates your progress. Those who are born poor are more likely to stay poor **(2)** and those who inherit privilege are more likely to pass on privilege **(3)** in England than in any comparable county. For those of us who believe in social justice this stratification and segregation are morally indefensible. And for those of us who want to see greater economic efficiency **(4)** it is a pointless squandering of our greatest asset - our children - to have so many from poorer backgrounds manifestly not achieving their potential. When more Etonians make it to Oxbridge **(3)** than boys and girls on benefit then we know we are not making the most of all our nation's talents **(4)**"

(Gove, 2012c)

These last two quotes have showed how the discourse has been constructed by the politicians in the following four stages.

1. *"We live in a profoundly unequal society"* – **The existing system is unequal**
2. *"Born poor are more likely to stay poor"* – **System let's down the poor**
3. *"Those who inherit privilege are more likely to pass on privilege"* – **Privileges the rich**
4. *"Greater economic efficiency"* – **Bad for business**

With the focus being placed repeatedly upon the margins between the rich and the poor, and the overriding purpose of driving social mobility, the politicians create the ‘*us and them*’ mentality with which to view policy. New Labour effectively represented everything that went wrong in education and society as a whole, contrary to that the Conservatives and the Big Society are depicted as a response to Big Government (Bochel, 2011) and a means by which to tackle inequality and drive aspiration and social mobility. The following extracts taken from the data demonstrate how the Coalition argued for their reforms and presented people with a choice:

“The gap in attainment between rich and poor, which widened in recent years, is a scandal. For disadvantaged pupils, a gap opens even before primary school. Leon Feinstein’s research has shown that the highest early achievers from deprived backgrounds are overtaken by lower achieving children from advantaged backgrounds by age five. Schools should be engines of social mobility – the places where accidents of birth and the unfairness of life’s lottery are overcome through the democratisation of access to knowledge. But in the schools system we inherited the gap between rich and poor just widens over time”

(Gove, 2010a)

“And it is, above all, my desire to grant individuals the right to shape their own future, which drives me. Education is, for me, about freeing people from imposed constraints, liberating them from the accidents of birth, allowing them to acquire the knowledge, skills and qualifications which allow them to choose the satisfying job they have always aspired to and the rich inner life which brings true fulfilment. Everything we are arguing for, and all the changes we hope to make, are about giving more children and young people the power to decide their own fates, to become authors of their own life stories”

(Gove, 2011b)

It is within this political casting that people most actively immerse themselves within both political discourse and the wider political narrative. The options are essentially characterised as:

- 1) If you support our reforms you are on the side of children and a supporter of increasing educational opportunities to drive social justice, or
- 2) If you are against us then you are happy with the status quo which perpetually increases the gap between what the richest children achieve and what the poorest children achieve

Whilst these characterisations are perhaps taken to the extreme, they nevertheless demonstrate the power that political discourses have in shaping both the debate and the beliefs of individual citizens. The next section of this paper interrogates the main paradox of neoliberal governance and the central concepts of much of the political discourse around education reform under the Coalition over the last five years.

Neoliberal paradox: freedom versus responsibility

According to Norman (2010) the Big Society “responds to huge public concern about the state of British society and the British economy” (p.5). This viewpoint argues for the need to move away from the ideas of Big Government and to then empower local communities and local people to drive change (see Bochel, 2011; Evans, 2011; Hope, 2012). In terms of social policy, specifically the field of

education reform, this means freedom and autonomy become principle components of the discourse:

“Academies are **free** from local authority control, can deploy resources in the most **effective** way and have the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff. They have **greater freedom** over the curriculum, and may also change the length of terms and school days. Yet they operate within a broad framework of **accountability** which is designed to ensure that standards remain high, and consistent. Our Academies Bill will allow more schools to **benefit from these freedoms**”

(Gibb, 2010)

It is clear from the above that the notion of ‘freedom’, and also ‘autonomy’ (see extract below), are coupled alongside the concepts of ‘responsibility’ and ‘accountability’. These dichotomies are both paradoxical and contradictory. The quote below exemplifies the importance of autonomy but at the same time makes the point of specific conditions for autonomy:

“But autonomy isn’t just a mechanism for reversing underperformance - it works for accelerating high performance as well. So we decided to allow those professionals who were already doing a brilliant job to really spread their wings. We began by allowing any outstanding school to convert to an Academy. **And now we’re enabling more schools to reap the benefits of autonomy by letting any schools apply for academy status - provided it’s teamed with a high-performing school.** The rapid conversion of so many great schools to academies means there is now a pool of excellent institutions to build chains of schools, simultaneously autonomous and collaborative, working in partnership to raise standards. Over 1,200 schools have applied for Academy status. Over 800 of these applications have been approved. Over 400 have already converted and are open - bringing the total number of open academies to over 700.”

(Gove, 2011a)

Here autonomy, and the ‘freedom’ to become an academy school, is not only conditional on meeting Whitehall’s criteria but consequently not really freedom at all. Would-be academy schools gain the ‘freedoms’ and ‘autonomy’ of academy status providing they partner with another ‘high performing’ academy. This development is designed to encourage the growth of clusters and chains of academies (see Hatcher & Jones, 2011) in the hope that they work together to drive up performance and standards across their particular chain. Essentially this is a further extension of the neoliberal market reforms that have become common-place in social and public policy arenas (see Wright, 2012). The following sample of data elucidates this point further:

“This is not cutting schools adrift to let them sink or swim, as some claim. We will still set high minimum expectations for schools. For secondary schools, this means, at least 35 per cent of pupils with 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and maths. And for primary schools, 60 per cent of the cohort achieving level 4 in English and maths combined and where progress is below the expected level. Crucially, both of these new floor standards will involve a progression measure as well as the raw attainment figure. But the onus should be on heads themselves to drive up standards, working together and drawing on the own wealth of expertise, experience, leadership and capacity within the system - without needing central government to mandate it through continual targets, ring-fenced grants and field forces”

(Gibb, 2011)

It is argued that the aim of the politicians inside the Coalition is to create the perception of freedom, cooperation, the forming of partnerships and the erosion of centralised influence from Whitehall. This next extract presents the policy of academisation as the very embodiment of Big Society

philosophy, that academy status is an ‘opportunity’ for local professionals, something they choose and engage in voluntarily:

“I want to stress the word ‘opportunity’. This is largely a permissive bill rather than a coercive one. And it will help schools right across the spectrum, from the very worst to the very best. Schools already rated as outstanding by Ofsted may have their applications fast-tracked, and open this year if they wish to. In return, we will expect every outstanding school which acquires academy freedoms to partner with at least one other school to raise performance across the system. Schools that are really struggling, my Lords, will see government intervention. There has always been a focus in the academies programme on the weakest schools, and that will continue. The Bill will allow the Secretary of State, in circumstances where a school is struggling, to remove a school from the control of the local authority and to reopen it as an academy. This will mean that we can deliver faster and deeper improvements in deprived and disadvantaged areas”

(Lord Hill, 2010)

As the Noble Lord Hill posits the words ‘opportunity’, ‘permissive’ and the assertion that these policies are aimed at *helping* those in ‘deprived and disadvantaged areas’ he additionally makes the underlying points that the SoS will have the power (freedom if you like) to remove a school from the LEA and reopen it as an academy. This point is alluded to in the data sample below:

“Officials from the Department will continue to support and facilitate the brokering of new academies between schools, local authorities and sponsors. I see this as a continuation of the collaborative approach that has been fostered over the years to secure the replacement of such schools with academies. I very much want that partnership approach to continue. For some years, we have also had powers on the statute book for the Secretary of State to intervene directly in failing schools. The new Academies Act enables me to make an Academy Order in respect of any school that is eligible for intervention. This includes, specifically, schools that Ofsted has judged to require special measures or significant improvement or which have failed to respond to a valid warning notice. I will be ready to use this power in the months ahead where I judge that academy status is in the best interests of an eligible school and its pupils, and where it has not been possible to reach agreement on a way ahead with the local authority, the school or both”

(Gove, 2011b)

Here the SoS on the one hand presents the perception of ‘collaboration’ and ‘partnership’ before articulating the instances and circumstances that would see him exercise control and political autonomy to intervene and impose academy status upon local schools through an ‘academy order’. The SoS does make the point that this only happens when a school and a group of teachers fail to turn around a ‘failing’ school ‘judged’ by Ofsted as requiring ‘significant improvement’. It would seem that in practical terms freedom and autonomy do exist as key cornerstones of the education reforms made under the Coalition, specifically in respect of academies and free schools (Hatcher, 2011; Hope, 2012). It is however the case that freedom exists for some not for all and the paradoxical nature of neoliberal governmentality centres on these dichotomies of ‘freedom and responsibility’ and ‘autonomy and accountability’.

Conclusion

In summary, the analysis offered here has demonstrated that the construction of political discourse is centred upon sustaining the current neoliberal approach to governance (Wright, 2012). Moreover, the underpinning concepts of the Big Society (like the Third Way) are designed to support

neoliberalism but at the same time they also illuminate the inherent paradoxes and contradictions of this form of governance. It remains clear that the 2015 General Election victory for the Conservative Party will mean the direction of reform for education policy will continue in much the same vein. With the focus remaining upon the economy, and the forthcoming constitutional debates about both the future of the whole United Kingdom (UK) and the future of the UK's relationship with the European Union, it remains unclear how much emphasis will be placed on the Big Society moving forward. Indeed, given the converging policy aims and political intentions between social and economic policy the Conservatives may seek to return to the rhetoric of creating an 'aspirational nation' to succeed in the global race rather than form a Big Society.

The role of neoliberal governance and neoliberal ideals, in shaping both social and economic policy priorities, remains a focal aspect of the current governments approach. In fact, with the absence of the Liberal Democrats it could be argued that this eventuality will be more profound than the days under the Coalition. The extension of the Free Schools programme and the continual approach to improve schools through joining academy chains and gaining academy status will mean that the paradoxes and contradictions discussed above will continue to dominate the education debate. Future research within this field should focus upon the unintended consequences of neoliberal governance and the paradoxes of freedom and responsibility. Attention should be placed on both how national policy intentions are translated by school leaders and then how these translations are enacted as a framework for local practice (see Ball et al., 2011). This line of inquiry is important given the emphasis placed on creating more Academies and more Free Schools. In addition, interested parties who oppose the neoliberal policies that currently dominate large areas of social policy should seek to develop credible and practical alternatives to neoliberalism and not simply add to the noise.

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