The policy implications of ‘thinking problematically’: Problematising the parent-school partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand’s Tomorrow’s Schools education reform policy

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Kim Hailwood

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Abstract

The policy implications of 'thinking problematically': Problematising the parent-school partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand's Tomorrow's Schools education reform policy

Prior to the 1987 general election, New Zealand's fourth Labour Government announced its intention to review the administration of the state schooling system. The government explained that the proposed education reforms would result in more parental and community involvement, highlighting that school boards of trustees, with elected parent representatives, would facilitate the development of a deeper partnership between parents and schools. The 1989 Tomorrow's Schools reforms consequently instituted changes to the way the New Zealand schooling system was organised and governed.

Over the last 30 years, Tomorrow's Schools has generated substantial commentary and analysis. The purpose of this thesis is not to ass ess whether the Tomorrow's Schools policy was an appropriate or effective solution. Rather, the study adopts Bacchi's (2009) Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) method to examine how 'problems' are thought about and represented in policy documents. In particular, the WPR approach questions the established understanding that policy is reactive; that is, a 'problem' exists and policy is implemented to 'fix' the 'problem'.

The study has two overarching objectives. First, to provide a worked example of Bacchi's (2009) WPR model in the field of education, focusing primarily on the solutions advanced in the government-appointed Picot Taskforce's 1988 ancillary report (*Administering for excellence*) and the government's 1988 policy response document (*Tomorrow's Schools*). The second objective is to comprehensively assess the WPR framework and its ability to recognise, challenge, and disrupt normative discourses, particularly in relation to the parent-school connection.

Bacchi's (2009) methodological framework specifically steps back from what appears common sense and asks how it has come to be. Accordingly, the goal is to subject the government texts to multiple forms of problem-questioning in order to identify the assumptions, origins, silences, and effects of the policy; thereby enabling other ways of conceptualising the 'problem'. As a result, attention is directed to a framework that explicates the purpose, power, and politics involved in policy.

As the first study to use Bacchi's (2009) WPR model to examine New Zealand's Tomorrow's Schools education reform policy, this thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge by opening up governing practices to scrutiny through the interrogation of problematisations. In this way, the study pays attention to the normalised and taken-for-granted truth claims that shaped and were shaped by the Tomorrow's Schools policy. At the same time, the thesis adds to a growing body of international literature highlighting the analysis of problematisations in education policy research.

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As I write these few words of thanks, I can hear the Beatle's *'The Long and Winding Road'* playing in the room a few doors down. The song certainly symbolises the journey I have taken over the last four years. This journey would not have been possible without the help and kindness of the following people and organisations.

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This passage quotes a ‘certain Chinese encyclopaedia’ in which it is written that ‘animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies’. In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that.

Michel Foucault, 1970, p. xv, Preface to ‘The Order of Things’

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Aotearoa	Meaning land of the long white cloud in te reo Māori. While New Zealand is the country's official name, Aotearoa is increasingly used as a parallel name, reflecting the nation's Māori heritage and identity.
Hui	Meeting or discussion, usually involving large numbers of people, guided by Māori cultural protocols.
Kotahitanga	Unity is the state of being united. Any group, as a collective, can establish and work towards achieving common goals; each member has a role in attaining these goals. When all members unite for a shared objective, success is more likely.
Mahi tahi	Collective action towards a defined objective or the execution of a designated task, frequently involving practical engagement. Mahi tahi represents the act of carrying out the task or activity for which individuals have convened.
Māori	Collectivising term for the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand.
Te reo Māori	The Māori language.
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	The Treaty of Waitangi is the original legal treaty signed in 1840 by representatives of Māori tribes and sub-tribes and representatives of the British Crown, over land and sovereignty rights for Māori. Te Tiriti o Waitangi achieved legal recognition in 1975.
Whānau	Family, extended family group; sometimes including those unrelated by blood but as close as family.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and context

1.1 Framing the study

> Parents belong at school. They are now in partnership with their principal and teachers to make their school a place where all children can get the kind of education they deserve. Tomorrow's Schools harnesses the most powerful force in education – the desire of parents to see their children do well at school.
>
> (Office of the Minister of Education, 1988)

Framed by the Minister of Education (1988) as one of the most significant educational policies ever announced by a New Zealand government, the 1989 Tomorrow's Schools reforms instituted changes to the way schools were organised and governed across the nation. Explaining why landmark education restructuring was necessary, including a parent-school partnership model for governing schools, the Prime Minister and Minister of Education, the Rt Hon. David Lange (2005), noted that the 'problem'[1] with education was so evident and so well-known that it was indisputable. In the ensuing years, there has been considerable analysis of the reasons for, and the effectiveness of, the Tomorrow's Schools policy approach. What has received less attention, however, is the assumption in the Prime Minister's assertion that the 'problem' was established, that it was already known.

This study challenges the premise that the 'problem' is a given (i.e., that everyone knows what it is). Accordingly, I employ the word 'problematisation' to encapsulate the methodological tenets used in this thesis. Foucault's (1977, cited in Bacchi, 2012) notion of problematisation is predicated on the assumption that societal 'problems' emerge within historical contexts and belief systems, which generate particular ways of understanding and conceptualising. Engaging in the analysis of policy through problematisation therefore involves questioning and challenging taken-for-granted truths that have circumvented attention (Van Aswegen et al., 2019).

[1] As a component of the policy process, a 'problem' can be defined as a social construction, rather than something that exists and is waiting to be solved. Therefore, in line with the post-structuralist approach of this study, when discussing a policy problem, I place the word 'problem' in single inverted commas to signify the associations and implications this word has.

Underpinned by Foucault's (1991a) work on governmentality, particularly in terms of how knowledge and power reinforce the notion of truth, along with which forms of knowledge are privileged over others, my study employs Bacchi's (2009) Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) method for policy (as discourse) analysis. As the name of the approach suggests, WPR facilitates the investigation of policy, directing attention to how the 'problem' is represented, and subjecting representations of the 'problem' to examination (Bacchi, 2012). This way of questioning contrasts with other types of policy analysis because it moves the focus from policy as a problem-solving exercise to policy as a process that constructs 'problems'. This does not mean that policies manufacture 'problems', but rather denotes that 'problems' presented in policy are not neutral; the 'problems' are supported by particular assumptions that allow specific points to be made about a 'problem' while excluding others.

This thesis examines a package of policy measures applied to a review of New Zealand's 110-year-old schooling system. Specifically, it focuses on the 1988 ancillary report, *Administering for excellence: Effective administration in education*, produced by the government-appointed Picot Taskforce (hereafter referred to as the Picot Report), and the subsequent 1988 government policy response document, *Tomorrow's Schools: The reform of education administration in New Zealand*. The background to these documents is provided in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2).

As Ideland et al. (2021) explain, rationalities and assumptions become dominant and routine in the way that we think 'with' them rather than 'about' them. In reviewing policy, there is an emphasis on evaluation as a means of determining the policy's effectiveness, focusing on how the policy might be changed rather than engaging with how it came about in the first place (Bacchi, 2009). Consequently, there is limited scrutiny of how a 'problem' is represented in policy, how this representation changes over time, and how individuals, as governable subjects, are shaped as a result of the 'problem' representation. To demonstrate the value of Bacchi's (2009) approach, this thesis submits the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents to a WPR analysis, thereby requiring the dismantling of fixed ways of thinking in order to reveal how this thinking has become normalised (Bacchi, 2012).

1.2 Setting the scene

The term Tomorrow's Schools, derived from the white paper *Tomorrow's Schools: The reform of education administration in New Zealand,* refers to the educational reforms initiated in 1989. Prior to

the enactment of Tomorrow's Schools, New Zealand's compulsory schooling system was characterised by a high degree of centralisation. Governance was administered by regional education boards for primary schools and boards of governors for secondary schools, under the oversight of the Department of Education. The reforms devolved governance and decision-making authority to individual schools, each governed by a board of trustees elected by parents, thereby establishing autonomous school entities.

One objective of the 1989 legislation was to change the influence parents had in school decision-making. Rather than simply supporting decisions as they had done in the past, it was expected that parents would play a key role in shaping school policy directly through their participation in decision-making (The Treasury, 1987b). This participation was to occur both directly through the school's board of trustees, and indirectly through school staff and board consultation with the wider parent body (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). This point was underscored in Prime Minister David Lange's communication to parents and schools, where he affirmed:

> We all want the best possible education for our children. Our schools must reach the highest standards. Our future depends upon the quality of education we provide now. … We need schools which will bring out the best in everyone – pupils, parents, and teachers. Parents and teachers together will make decisions, which are at present made in offices in Wellington. Our schools will be quicker to adapt to the needs of the modern world.
> (Office of the Minister of Education, 1988)

The fourth Labour Government's Tomorrow's Schools policy document reinforced terms such as involvement, engagement, and partnership. In 1988, Prime Minister David Lange explained that the government's education reforms would result in more parental and community involvement, highlighting that school boards of trustees, with elected parent representatives, would bring schools and communities together to facilitate the development of "a deeper partnership between school staff and the parents of children at the school" (Minister of Education, 1988, p. iv).

Published studies highlight the benefits of close parent-school connections, including improved academic achievement (Castro et al., 2015; Ishimaru, 2013), positive effects on behaviour (Lewis et al., 2011), increased student motivation (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012), higher school completion rates (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), reduced absenteeism (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003), and improved wellbeing (Kuperminc et al., 2008). At a broader level, the literature indicates that shared perceptions of trust, openness, flexibility, and communication can promote optimal parent-school engagement and enhance collaborative efforts (Antony-Newman, 2019; Keyes, 2000).

As part of a series of best evidence syntheses commissioned by the Ministry of Education to strengthen its policy evidence base, the examination of parent-school relationships within New Zealand was summarised in the Biddulph et al. report (2003). This report, frequently cited in New Zealand studies as an important source of data, details how parental involvement in student learning can improve outcomes more effectively than schools operating independently. Following the implementation of Tomorrow's Schools in 1989, parents were positioned as key stakeholders, partners, consumers, and decision-makers in their local schools. Notably, Biddulph et al. (2003) emphasise that policies promoting parent-school connections often overlook the inherent complexities of these relationships.

Durie (1994, p. 87) explains that effective partnership within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand requires collaborative efforts between all parties, drawing an analogy to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the commitment to "working together to realise mutually acceptable goals". This emphasis on shared objectives was further reinforced by Durie (2001) at the inaugural Hui Taumata Mātauranga (national Māori education summit). He underscored the importance of augmenting cooperation between institutions such as homes and schools, advocating for "consistency and a shared sense of direction". Durie (2001) refers to the practice of developing greater cohesion between homes and schools as a principle of integrated action, asserting that:

> Success or failure is the result of many forces acting together – school and community; teachers and parents; students and their peers; Māori and the State. Lives in New Zealand are too closely intertwined to pretend that action in one sphere does not have repercussions in another. Unless there is some platform for integrated action, then development will be piecemeal and progress will be uneven. (p. 7)

Several government reports preceding the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools emphasised the necessity for comprehensive strategies addressing the educational needs of Māori students. Notably, the 1960 Hunn Report provided an in-depth review of the Department of Māori Affairs and proposed recommendations for social reforms impacting Māori. Similarly, the 1976 McCombs Report, titled 'Towards Partnership', suggested various measures to enhance the educational outcomes for Māori students. These reports highlighted the critical importance of establishing robust and reciprocal relationships between parents, communities, and schools to create an environment conducive to the development of Māori learners.

Given the limited availability of New Zealand-based research demonstrating a correlation between the involvement of Māori whānau in education and favourable learning outcomes, a best evidence synthesis report focusing on school leadership, commissioned by the Ministry of Education, scrutinised the impact of parent-school collaboration on student achievement (Robinson et al., 2009). This synthesis identified select studies examining connections with Māori whānau, revealing that particular modalities of school and family engagement, as well as targeted interventions, can yield significant positive effects on students' educational and social outcomes (Robinson et al., 2009). Berryman et al. (2015) further elucidate that the efficacy of these connections is contingent upon mahi tahi (collaborative processes), which engender relational trust and a sense of kotahitanga (unity of purpose) between the school and whānau.

In a communication dated July 2020, the Secretary for Education stressed to all Ministry of Education staff that establishing strong and authentic connections with parents and whānau/family was the single most effective measure that educators and leaders could undertake to improve student attendance and achievement (I. Holsted, personal communication, July 9, 2020). In a comparable manner, the Secretary for Education reiterated this point in an April 2024 all staff message, noting that educationally powerful connections between schools and whānau/family were crucial (I. Holsted, personal communication, April 4, 2024).

Both in New Zealand and internationally, the terms parental involvement (in schools) and parental engagement (with student learning) lack clear definitions and encompass a wide range of activities, measures, and initiatives. The inconsistency in terminology is evident as words such as involvement, engagement, participation, and partnership are frequently used interchangeably in research and policy. The problematic aspects of failing to distinguish between these terms are repeatedly noted in the literature (see, for example, Baker & Soden, 2005; de Carvalho, 2001; Ferlazzo, 2011; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Kim & Sheridan, 2015; Pushor, 2007, 2017; Vincent, 2017).

While Jeynes (2018) contends the debate on terminology is unlikely to be resolved in the near term, Tveit (2009, p. 291) foregrounds that “a concept is not only indicative of the relations it covers; it is also a factor within them. Thus, descriptions of parent involvement impact how the phenomenon of parent involvement develops”. The lack of a clear operational definition, according to Fan and Williams (2010), adds to the complexity of the parent-school relationship. Terms used in the literature to explain the parent-school relationship are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Terms Used to Describe the Parent-School Connection

Terminology	Designation
Involvement	● Ishimaru and Takahashi (2017) define parental involvement as a deficit-based approach, privileging normative school-centric behaviours. ● Acting as an umbrella term, parental involvement generally categorises the various types of activities that parents use to connect with schools, including direct behaviours (e.g., communicating with school staff, participating in school activities such as parent-teacher meetings and fundraising) and indirect behaviours (e.g., supporting learning at home, discussing schools, talking about educational expectations) (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). ● As practised in schools and reflected in the literature, parental involvement avoids issues of power and assigns parents a passive role in the maintenance of school culture, with schools directing them (Lines et al., 2011; Shirley, 1997). ● Epstein's (2010) framework (six types of involvement based on the home, school, and community having overlapping spheres of influence) has become a predominant model globally as a toolkit to assist in framing thinking around parent-school involvement. ● Epstein's (2010) approach is described by some as too prescriptive and supporting a singular view of involvement, privileging certain parental activities while ignoring others (Kohl et al., 2000; Lopez, 2001).
Engagement	● Parental engagement reflects a reciprocal process, involving schools listening to and working with parents as active participants (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Shirley, 1997). ● Ishimaru and Takahashi (2017) define parental engagement as endeavours to reach out and better integrate non-dominant families into the schooling system. ● Characterising parental engagement as an improved (upgraded) parental involvement framework, Ishimaru and Takahashi (2017, p. 348) note the goal remains to integrate parents into pre-existing models promoting "white, middle-class, English-speaking, two-parent, heterosexual families as the norm". ● Approaches to parental engagement suggest a broad range of measures, many concentrated on involvement in school rather than engagement in learning. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) position the terminology on a continuum, moving through three points: (1) parental involvement with schools, (2)

	parental involvement with schooling, and (3) parental engagement with children's learning. ● Bonne and Stevens (2017) maintain that a parent's support for their child, and by extension their school, remains a core aspect of what many parents, and others, consider engagement to be, and the level at which many schools operate.
Partnership	● Partnership is defined as a cooperative relationship in which parents and schools have joint responsibilities and shared power, with reciprocal benefits (Auerbach, 2011). ● Calder (1995) submits that partnership is a loosely defined, but fashionable concept, with fluid and permeable boundaries. ● Across definitions, there is a general consensus that partnership includes (1) working reciprocally, (2) equality and respect, (3) shared power and responsibility, (4) shared decision-making, and (5) valuing complementary expertise (Christenson, 2004; Tett, 2001). ● MacGiolla-Phadraig (2005) and Fine (1993, cited in Stellmach 2005), among others, note that if the relationship is to be accurately described as a partnership, priority must be given to parental influence and active involvement in decision-making. ● Christenson and Sheridan (2001) highlight gaps between what is found in the literature and everyday parent-school practices, pointing out there is more rhetoric than reality about parents and schools working together as genuine partners.

1.3 The study's objectives and research questions

Over the decades, burgeoning guidance has been provided to New Zealand government departments, ministries, and agencies to better realise the goal of evidence-based policy; expressly, to help answer the question of 'what works?'. This way of thinking about policy underscores an implicit representation of government as a problem-solving entity. Unlike such prescribed approaches, my study refrains from assessing the efficacy of policy as an appropriate or effective solution to a certain 'problem'. Instead, the thesis takes a post-structuralist position, with an interest in questioning the assumptions on which contemporary education policy and practice are based, and how policy itself creates the 'problem' it purports to solve.

Accordingly, addressing a gap in the literature, a goal of the study is to counter the emphasis on the evaluation of policies in terms of their outcomes, with an analysis of how 'problems' are thought about and represented in policy documents. In establishing that policy not only embodies but also constructs the issues under examination, the thesis demonstrates that while the Tomorrow's Schools policy discourse may act as an influential and officially-endorsed form of 'truth', in reality it is based on an inherently ideological way of representing the 'problem' it claims to deal with. This way of thinking challenges the positivist perspective of policy as a value-neutral occurrence that is developed in a vacuum or in isolation (Tenbensel, 2004).

Bacchi's (2009) WPR framework questions the established assumption that policies are reactions to 'problems', extraneous to the policy process, waiting to be solved. Therefore, rather than proceeding on the basis that policies address pre-established problems, Bacchi (2009) maintains that policies are active in producing the 'problems' they claim to solve. In this study, by probing the 'problem' representations in government texts, I draw attention to the way policy frames a particular 'problem', impacting the shape of the issue being considered, and, subsequently, the policy proposal. As Maguire and George (2017) explain, this means that governments construct specific notions about what the 'problem' is in order that the policy answer or solution is the strategy they are seeking to implement. In line with this, Bacchi (2009) makes evident that documents, like the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools texts, should not be viewed as neutral, but, rather, need to be understood as generating particular truths while concealing others.

The thesis has two objectives. First, to provide a schema, a worked example, of Bacchi's (2009) post-structuralist WPR approach in the field of education and, second, to comprehensively assess the WPR framework and its ability to recognise, challenge, and disrupt normative discourses.

To realise these objectives, the study seeks to identify the rationalities and assumptions underlying the Tomorrow's Schools policy discourse, particularly in relation to the parent-school connection. It does so by posing the question ***What is the 'problem' represented to be in the New Zealand Tomorrow's Schools education reform policy?***

The intention of this broad-based question is to provide an entry point, through the examination of what the 'problem' is understood to be and what solutions are proposed to address it, together with the arguments as to why it is seen as a 'problem' to be addressed by policy. This allows for further investigation by way of the following sub-questions, developed on the basis of Bacchi's (2009) WPR method.

1. What assumptions/rationalities underlie the representation of the 'problem'?
2. How, when, and why did the 'problem' representation emerge?
3. What is left unproblematic or silenced in the 'problem' representation?
4. What effects are produced by the representation of the 'problem'?

My thesis adds to the emergent field of research that demonstrates the utility of the WPR method within different policy fields, and the types of insights that can be attained from this methodological approach to the analysis of policy. In this capacity, it suggests a useful way of understanding the complexities of government policy.

1.4 Researcher positioning

An important consideration in this study is the impact of my positionality on the identified 'problem' representations and the subsequent analytical process. As a researcher, I recognise that I am involved in certain ways of thinking that shape how I perceive an issue as a particular type of 'problem'. In order to examine where this thinking comes from, Bacchi (2011) prioritises a process that requires the researcher to subject their own thinking to self-scrutiny, referred to as 'problematising the self'. The practice of self-problematisation denotes an awareness that researchers are located subjects, immersed in specific ways of seeing the world. Self-problematisation is not simply a recommendation to become reflexive; it involves an active practice of questioning taken-for-granted meanings and assumptions that have been accepted as 'truth'.

It is therefore imperative to assert at the outset of my thesis that as a researcher I am not value-free, detached from historical context, or apolitical. Rather, I come with positions, beliefs, and privileges that have been shaped by my personal and professional experiences, particularly within the realm of education policy. Over the past 35 years, I have worked as a senior advisor within various New Zealand government departments, engaging extensively in the formulation, dissemination, and implementation of policy. This engagement has entailed translating broad educational policy directions into operational policies, developing these operational policies into actionable programmes, and facilitating the coordination between programme management and the external organisations tasked with delivering these policies.

Moving from educational policymaker to educational researcher necessitates a process of reassessing and potentially relinquishing professional skills and judgements that have been ingrained as natural, normative, and rational. This transition aligns with Foucault's (2007, p. 47) concept of a space that questions the effects of "power on the discourses of truth". Similarly, Bacchi and Goodwin (2016, p. 9) advance a "post-structural sensibility" in relation to the policymaker / analyst engaging in the practices of interrogating, critiquing, and assessing policies, and through these practices, unmaking and remaking policy.

My positioning in relation to this thesis is further discussed in Chapter 9 as part of Bacchi's (2009) final WPR phase, self-problematisation.

1.5 Why this study matters

On commencing my thesis, of relevance was a quotation from Foucault (1981, cited in Rajchman, 1988, p. 108, emphasis in original), which notes:

> Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work it has been on the basis of elements from my experience – always in relations I *saw* taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I recognised something cracked, dully jarring, or dysfunctioning in the things I *saw*, in the institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, that I undertook a particular piece of work.

In my experience with public policy, I have frequently encountered a sense of disjunction. Adhering to the prescribed governmental policymaking cycle, encompassing stages of identification, definition, formulation, and consultation, I have often found myself disillusioned with this singular technical approach. This method typically presents policy ideas through a set of standardised tools and arguments. My primary concern lies with the initial stage of policy thinking; namely, the propensity to start from the premise of 'we know what the problem is, we just need to define it and then agree on how to fix it'. This method of questioning is predominantly functional and rarely theoretical.

In line with Grace (1995, p. 19), I try to "consciously explore" an issue differently. This approach often engenders uncertainty and frustration among colleagues who adhere to the established policy processes, even when they do not fully endorse them.

This dissertation undertakes a rigorous examination of problematisations within official discourse, specifically as represented in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents. The concept of problematisation serves as a framing exercise, elucidating a particular way of looking at how an issue emerges as a 'problem', at a certain time, and with distinct consequences. In this context, problematisations foreground the socio-political and historical settings in which issues manifest as 'problems'. While the methodological approach employed in this study introduces a novel perspective, it builds upon an extensive body of scholarly inquiry into the Tomorrow's Schools reforms, much of which dates back three decades (Codd, 1990, 1999, 2005; Gordon, 1992, 1999; McKenzie, 1997; Nash, 1989; Nash & Harker, 1992, 2005; Openshaw, 2009; Simon, 2000; Snook, 1990; Snook et al., 1999; Sullivan, 1992; Wylie, 2007, 2012).

Initially, this research aimed to analyse the construction of family-school relationships within New Zealand's educational context, with the goal of enhancing these interactions in the future. An extensive literature review was conducted, exploring the rationale, influences, and challenges associated with parental engagement in schools. While this review provided valuable insights, it became evident that these aspects were of limited relevance to the discursive focus of this study. Through my initial engagement with Foucault's scholarship (Gutting, 2005; McHoul & Grace, 1993), I recognised the need to rethink the concept of the parent-school relationship, not from a pragmatic 'what works' standpoint, but by problematising it as an entrenched and unchallenged practice. This realisation led me to adopt a post-structuralist stance, aiming to interrogate, as Foucault (1994a, p. 456) articulates, the "type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking [upon which] the accepted practices are based".

In contrast to traditional forms of analysis, this study offers an alternative perspective of the Tomorrow's Schools policy. Rather than evaluating the policy's effectiveness, my research engages in actively disrupting and challenging the assumptions, origins, silences, and effects inherent within the policy, thereby disrupting its intrinsic logic. This methodological approach facilitates the unsettling, dislodging, and reconstituting of dominant meanings, thus enabling a fundamental reconceptualisation of the policy. In effect, this allows for the possibility of "thinking otherwise" about the Tomorrow's Schools policy (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 22).

The efficacy of Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach in problematising current policy 'problems', their construction, and representation, whilst conceptualising alternative possibilities, is evidenced through the detailed example presented in this dissertation. Consequently, to say or do things differently requires fundamental shifts in the conditions that govern the policy landscape, thereby facilitating different approaches and outcomes. Specifically, if today's parents are to engage actively in parent-

school partnerships, transformative change is imperative; otherwise, parents will remain largely passive recipients of the broader determinants of policy.

Accordingly, as the first study to employ Bacchi's (2009) WPR model to examine New Zealand's Tomorrow's Schools education reform policy, this thesis makes a significant scholarly contribution by subjecting governing practices to critical scrutiny through the interrogation of problematisations. Attention is directed towards the normalised and taken-for-granted truth claims that both shaped and were shaped by the Tomorrow's Schools policy. Additionally, this thesis contributes to the expanding body of international literature focused on the critical examination of problematisations within education policy research (see, for example, Alfrey et al., 2021; Burgess et al., 2023; Custers & Magalhaes, 2023; Jones, 2021; Starkey & Wood, 2021; Tawell & McCluskey, 2021).

Ultimately, the significance of my thesis lies in its practical implications. Foremost among these is the acknowledgement that alternative possibilities exist. In an era marked by an overarching focus on problem-solving, as exemplified by evidence-based policy and the promotion of researchers and policymakers as problem-solvers, Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach fundamentally challenges the notion of 'problems' as immutable starting points for policy development. Through the rigorous application of the WPR model, this dissertation engenders a transformative shift in the conceptualisation and engagement with policy issues among policymakers, researchers, and practitioners.

1.6 Defining key terminology

Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) assert that an unquestioned use of terms and categories can result in supporting and reinforcing certain realities as 'real' and unchangeable. Bacchi (2009) specifically highlights that research, like policymaking, can normalise particular ways of thinking and acting on a 'problem'. Therefore, with a focus on clarity, this section presents key terms, which are expounded upon in the study's subsequent chapters.

Policy

Policy is characterised as a course of action proposed by a government or an organisation, articulated in documents, to address an issue or 'problem'. It encompasses proposals for change and expectations for the whole population, or particular sub-groups, to conduct themselves in certain ways (Bacchi, 2009). For the purpose of this thesis, policy is defined as a package of objectives, principles, and goals that direct governmental actions and agendas, influences the behaviour of various stakeholders, and produces specific outcomes.

Problems / Problematisation

Bacchi's (2009) problematisation approach describes the way 'problems' are constructed in response to the issues they are looking to address. This perspective facilitates thinking about what policies mean and what policymaking does. Inevitably, 'problems' are not fixed, stable phenomena, waiting to be identified by policymakers and solved, but are made in and through policy itself. In this way, Bacchi (2009) contends policies can be thought of as producing the 'problems' that they are designed to fix.

Partnership

Within the scope of this thesis, partnership refers to the relationship between parents and schools, where parents participate in school-based decision-making. Partnership means partners work together to identify common objectives and reach consensus, rather than imposing a particular view. It encompasses discussion and negotiation. Parent-school partnerships are predicated on the principles of shared power, responsibility, and ownership. These partnerships involve distinct roles, shared aims and goals based on a mutual understanding of the educational needs of children, and collective actions where parents and schools work together (Butcher et al., 2011).

Parent

For the purpose of this study, the term 'parent' encompasses not only a child's biological parent but also a legal guardian or any other individual acting in loco parentis, such as a grandparent or step-parent with whom the child resides, or an individual legally responsible for the child's welfare. As defined by Goodall (2017, p. 6), a parent is an "adult who has a significant caring role in relation to a child, particularly those with an interest or involvement in the child's learning".

Community

In this dissertation, the term 'community' is defined as a collective of individuals and organisations, both internal and external to the educational institution, who are closely associated with a specific school. These individuals and organisations share common educational values regarding the academic and social wellbeing of students, and engage collaboratively to promote these values. As Epstein (1992, p. 14) explains, "community refers to the child's home neighbourhood, the school neighbourhood, school context, and the wider local community of business, civic, cultural, religious, and other organisations and agencies that influence children's learning and development".

1.7 Organisation of the thesis

In this introductory chapter, I have set the scene for my study, outlined the purpose of the research, and explained why the thesis is important. Below, I provide an overview of the study's structure.

The documentary sources used in this study were drawn from policy documentation, ancillary reports, and scholarly literature. These sources are employed as evidence and separate data resources, underpinning the discussions and data analysis within each chapter. As a result, this thesis does not contain a dedicated literature review chapter; instead, relevant literature is integrated and examined throughout the dissertation.

Chapter 2 presents the conceptual framework guiding the study. The thesis is located within a Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist context, with a specific emphasis on the discursive relationships of power, knowledge, and truth. Focusing purposely on policy as discourse, particular attention is paid to the investigative usefulness of discursive practices to explain how the processes of meaning making are influenced by political interests, power relations, institutional practices, and ideologies. Towards the end of the chapter, Bacchi's (2009) 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) methodology is introduced, highlighting the important role that policies play in shaping the 'problems' they seek to resolve.

Chapter 3 situates the study within a post-structuralist research paradigm, using documents as data. The chapter outlines the methodological approach, explaining the set of six questions that both comprise the WPR model and structure this thesis. As examples of what Bacchi (2009, p. 34) describes as "prescriptive texts or practical texts", the government-appointed Picot Taskforce's 1988 ancillary report, *Administering for excellence: Effective administration in education* (the Picot Report), and the government's 1988 policy response document, *Tomorrow's Schools: The reform of education administration in New Zealand,* provide points of entry for the study's WPR analysis. The research process operationalising the conceptual framework is detailed, together with the challenges experienced in the study's application of the WPR model.

Chapter 4 begins with a brief outline of the Tomorrow's Schools education reforms (1987-1989). This is followed by the application of Bacchi's (2009) method, using the first WPR question (*What is the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?*) to locate the problematisations contained in the government texts. The chapter identifies three 'problem' representations: (1) an inflexible and

ineffective education system that prevents localised decision-making, (2) inefficient government bureaucracy resulting in unsatisfactory service provision, and (3) uneven equity of outcomes. These are described in turn and illustrated with relevant excerpts from the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents.

Chapter 5 commences the critical analysis of the problematisations identified, using a form of Foucauldian archaeology to uncover assumptions, unexamined ways of thinking, and taken-for-granted knowledges/discourses. Applying the second WPR question (*What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?*), the chapter demonstrates that, at one level, the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents present a strong example of a shift towards education as a commodity in the marketplace; a conceptual logic (knowledge framework) to which all other logics are attached. Concurrently, the government texts incorporate social justice themes (e.g., parental involvement, local decision-making, a 'fair and just' education system) with the language, principles, and practices of business and the marketplace.

Chapter 6 pauses the analysis of the government texts themselves in order to situate the problematisations within a historical and broader socio-economic and ideological context, which is the focus of the third WPR question (*How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?*). Using a Foucauldian genealogical approach to trace the specific junctures when decisions were made and directions were decided upon, two genealogical strands are identified (one being the emergence of the parent-school partnership paradigm, and the other being the inception of neoliberal policy). The chapter demonstrates how the 'problem' representations in the Tomorrow's Schools discourse weave together these two genealogical strands.

Chapter 7 returns to the analysis of the government texts, applying WPR question four (*What is left unproblematic in this 'problem' representation?*) to destabilise the problematisations by uncovering issues that have failed to be problematised (e.g., have been silenced, left out, or ignored). Unproblematised issues highlighted in this chapter involve partnership, inequality, barriers, and power relations. For example, the government texts rely on objectivity to mediate the interactions between parents and schools, positioning relationships within the power structure as equal, despite subjectivity and positionality within schools being a strong determinant in parent-school interactions. In this chapter, a form of 'thinking otherwise' is promoted to find alternatives (i.e., other ways of conceptualising the 'problem') to the ones constructed in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents.

Chapter 8 considers the central theme of the fifth WPR question (*What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?*), which develops Bacchi's (2009) interest in who benefits from a particular 'problem' representation, and who is harmed. Accordingly, the overall objective is to recognise which elements of the problematisations have deleterious outcomes for which groups, and may subsequently need to be rethought. Three overlapping effects are incorporated in this chapter: the discursive effects (limiting what can be thought and said in relation to the 'problem'), the subjectification effects (the processes that produce subject positions, with some groups seeing themselves as different to others), and the lived effects (the material impacts on an individual's everyday life).

Chapter 9 completes the study's inquiry. In response to the first part of WPR question six (*How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated, and defended?*), the targeted advertising campaign employed to promote and validate Tomorrow's Schools is discussed. The second part of question six (*How could the 'problem' representation be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?*) opens up space to challenge assumed truths upon which the 'problem' representation relies; the purpose being to contest dominant discourses and allow for alternative possibilities. Bacchi's (2009) directive to the researcher to subject their own values, assumptions, and rationales to the WPR process (self-problematisation) is then addressed. In the chapter's final section, the methodological contribution that can be realised by applying a Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist approach to the analysis of policy, and more specifically by employing Bacchi's (2009) WPR model, is appraised.

CHAPTER 2:

Conceptual Framework

My role is to address problems effectively, really; and to pose them with the greatest possible rigour, with the maximum complexity and difficulty, so that a solution does not arise all at once because of the thought of some reformer or even in the brain of a political party.

(Foucault, 1991b, p. 158)

2.1 Introduction

The conceptual framework, outlining the model within which my research is set, begins by briefly discussing the meaning applied to the term policy and its corollary process, policy analysis. I then locate the study within a Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist framework more generally, and more specifically, within the concept of governmentality, which seeks to distil and analyse "unexamined ways of thinking" that support accepted practices (Foucault, 1994a, p. 456, cited in Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 21).

The chapter focuses purposely on policy-as-discourse, with particular attention paid to the investigative utility of discursive practices to explain how power and knowledge are closely connected to systems of governing. The study draws on the theoretical foundations associated with Foucault's (1991a) thinking on governmentality, including the way in which institutions seek to shape, guide, and direct the behaviour and thinking of people, as well as the ways in which individuals govern themselves.

In the final section, Bacchi's (2009) 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach is explored as a tool for extending existing post-structural and governmental analyses to ask how education policy issues are problematised or constituted as a certain type of 'problem'. The use of the WPR model aligns with the study's interest in interrogating taken-for-granted assumptions, presuppositions, and ways of thinking upon which accepted practices are produced and reproduced.

2.2 The concept of policy and policymaking

To begin, it is important to consider the concept of policy. As this study makes use of education policy as a form of data, an understanding of the term is consequential as it influences how the research is approached and how the results are interpreted.

The multifaceted nature of theoretical frameworks explaining policy makes the provision of a straightforward definition difficult. Ball (1994) states that the meaning of policy is often taken-for-granted, leading researchers to overlook the critical necessity of conceptual clarity. This oversight, according to Ball (1994, p. 15), results in what he terms "theoretical and epistemological dry rot" within the field of education policy research. Similarly, Prunty (1985) acknowledges the absence of a standardised definition, characterising policy as inherently ambiguous, employed across various contexts with differing degrees of precision and formality.

One specific interpretation defines policy as a statement of intent; something that is written down in a document, with aims or goals, or statements of what should happen (Blakemore & Griggs, 2007). Viewed in this way, policy 'leads the way', defining what is appropriate to consider in a given set of circumstances, and what is not. This is consistent with Birkland's (2019) conceptualisation of policy as a plan of what to do, which has been officially agreed to by either a group of people, an organisation, or a government, to achieve certain goals.

Colebatch (2006, p. 7) asserts that policy is the result of decision-making processes by governments as the "authorised decision-makers". This model is purposely prescriptive, following a rational progression of distinct stages from policy development to implementation and evaluation (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Predicated on the 'science of policy' or the 'policy sciences', this approach, drawn from the fields of natural science and other forms of positivistic-empirical inquiry, acknowledges that, in the interests of efficiency and to benefit the general population, the production of useful knowledge requires objective, value-free solutions to problems (Colebatch, 2006). According to this methodology, the policymaker is presented as an apolitical expert, rationally selecting the best course of action based on scientifically-oriented data (Shaw, 2010). Within this logical, problem-solving process, "it is assumed that the world is to a large extent empirically knowable and often measurable [and] knowledge used for policy must be capable of withstanding scientific scrutiny" (Mayer et al., 2018, p. 166).

Since the 1990s, there has been a global shift towards a wider use of 'evidence' within policy formulation. As a result, the concept of 'evidence-based' or 'evidence-informed' approaches, or at

least the rhetoric surrounding them, has become embedded in international policy development. Governments increasingly seek to frame their actions and decisions as being validated by evidence (Wiseman et al., 2010). Despite its widespread use, some literature on the evidence-based model contests the precise meaning of the term, and whether such an approach can be fully realised (Biesta, 2007, 2010; Boaz et al., 2019; Parkhurst, 2016; Powell, 2011; Standring, 2017). Critics, including Pollitt and Hupe (2011) and Wesselink et al. (2014), argue that the lack of a clear, fixed definition allows policymakers to project their own meaning on to the evidence-based concept, thereby justifying a range of actions by referencing it.

Notwithstanding, it should be noted that most assessments of the evidence-based model do not oppose the general principle that research and data should inform the policymaking process, or that when there is substantive evidence, this is not ignored. Rather, opponents of evidence-based approaches focus on the prevailing discourse that moves past inherently framing policy as something that benefits from evidence to something that needs evidence (and, in practice, little else) (Mayer et al., 2018).

Within New Zealand government departments, evidence-based policy, with its familiar mantra of 'what works' to 'fix' a predetermined 'problem', is a widely employed approach. In 2009, the evidence-based model was embedded in government departments through the establishment of chief science advisor positions, primarily to improve the use of evidence in the formulation of policy (Gluckman, 2011, 2013). The Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor emphasised that policymaking processes were not making sufficient use of robust data and research findings, and that actively working to strengthen the influence and prominence of evidence would result in the improved quality of policy and, consequently, better public services and outcomes (Gluckman, 2011, 2013). The continued practice of presenting policy as the rational outcome of official problem-solving is, as Colebatch (2009) argues, a way of making the result acceptable, and validating the policy as a form of legitimate authority. Hajer and Wagenaar (2003, p. 16) claim that the evidence-based approach empowers policymakers to "deliver objective, certain knowledge to their political taskmasters".

By contrast, rather than viewing policy as a technical process solving clearly defined problems, Stacey and Mockler (2024) contend that policy comprises a plurality of socially constructed and socio-historical context-dependent meanings. From this viewpoint, policy is not solely produced through the state's decision-making powers, but is seen as a process of meaning-making. Participants, both inside and outside government, address pertinent questions, approaching them from different perspectives, and applying various criteria to define both the 'problem' and the appropriate responses (Colebatch et al., 2010a). Accordingly, education policy cannot be understood in isolation from the range of measures that have shaped its development.

This approach to policy, which entails investigating its sources and how it operates, constitutes a broader enterprise of understanding the processes of governance and their subsequent effects on the governed population. As a result, the examination of education policy through a Foucauldian lens extends beyond the narrow focus on government institutions, endeavouring instead to examine the diverse social knowledge bases that inform policy decisions. The following section scrutinises the applicability of a Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist approach to the analysis of education policy.

2.3 Taking a Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist approach to the analysis of policy

Through the adoption of a post-structuralist approach, this study provides an alternative narrative to the current 'what works' focus on education policy. Post-structuralist theorists repudiate the notion of universal truth and objective knowledge. Rather, it is asserted that truth is partial, and knowledge is 'situated'; namely, "produced by and for particular interests, in particular circumstances, at particular times" (MacLure, 2013, p. 167). Also integral to a post-structuralist approach is to "insist that the realities we live are contingent, open to challenge and change" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 4).

Post-structuralism is sited within a discursive change that emerged in response to structuralism. Structuralism presupposes that individuals occupy distinct and structured positions, with the relationship between these positions considered to be largely deterministic and static (Peters & Burbules, 2004). Although post-structuralism cannot be classified into a single theory, key tenets underpin the approach. For example, a core element is Foucault's (1994a) notion of critique. Critique enables concepts of knowledge and power to be studied, not to provide answers that can be deemed the truth but to facilitate the examination of issues in innovative ways, thereby allowing the researcher to reconceptualise different ways of looking and understanding power relations. As Foucault (1988a) notes:

> A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practice that we accept rests. (p. 154)

St. Pierre (2000, p. 479) emphasises this aspect in her overview of post-structuralism in education, observing that "post-structural critiques … can be employed to examine any commonplace situation,

any ordinary event or process, in order to think differently about that occurrence – to open up what seems 'natural' to other possibilities".

Instead of centring on the claimed neutrality of systems for understanding the nature of the world and how it operates, critiques presage the ways that systems are grounded in certain ways of thinking, regard specific cultural norms as universal, and marginalise some perspectives or modes of thought. A focus of such critiques is the manner in which taken-for-granted assumptions work to reinforce existing social structures; for example, by designating some characteristics as normal and others as abnormal (Foucault, 1991a).

Accordingly, in line with post-structuralist thinking, it is recognised that knowledge is a human construct, replete with values and beliefs that are constructed through meaning-making, anchored in specific times and places, and shaped by historical and cultural factors (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Underscoring that Foucault adds an 's' to the end of the word knowledge (i.e., expounding knowledges rather than knowledge), Bacchi (2009) highlights that there are always multiple, contestable knowledges. Consequently, as there are numerous constructions of meaning, post-structuralism focuses on determining how certain meanings emerge over others; together with how different voices and knowledges are empowered or restricted (Bacchi, 2009).

Integrating a post-structuralist theoretical perspective into the WPR framework, Bacchi (2009) identifies that every policy is an account of reality, including a representation of what the 'problem' is. Bacchi (2009, p. 35) submits that this does not mean that representation is "opposed to the 'real'". Rather, it signifies that "representations … are the practices through which things take on meaning and value …" (Shapiro, 1988, p. xi, cited in Bacchi, 2009, p. 35). Consequently, located within a Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist framework and challenging a rigid positivist distinction between policy and politics, my thesis asserts that, like policymaking itself, the analysis of education policy is not value-neutral, nor is it abstracted from what Stone (1997, p. 7) describes as the 'mess' of politics.

I now draw on the work of Foucault to explain the key tenets of a post-structuralist model.

2.4 Policy-as-discourse

Foucault's (1970, p. 80) broad explanation of discourse as a "general domain of all statements" encapsulates the notion that discourse can be used to signify communication that has meaning and

some effect. Therefore, from a Foucauldian perspective, discourse is a tool for looking beneath the surface at how things are said, to determine what can or cannot be said in specific contexts, and why (Clarke, 2017).

Looking beyond the immediate message to understand how an education policy text produces and disseminates particular concepts, viewpoints, and issues (i.e., 'ways of knowing'), and how some discourses are considered more credible than others, I employ Ball's (1993a) two-way understanding of policy-as-text and policy-as-discourse. Each conceptualisation, in part, defines what a policy is, with both insights inextricably linked. Ball (1994) notes, however, that policy-as-text neglects the big picture; that is, it concentrates on what the policymaker thinks and incorporates into the policy agenda, but misses what they do not think or deliberately leave out. As Ball (1994, p. 21, emphasis in original) details, policy is not only a text, but also a power relation, whereby power is exercised through "a *production* of 'truth' and 'knowledge', as discourses".

In effect, a policy-as-discourse model, based on the premise that actions represent meanings that have been shaped by political interests, power relations, institutional practices, and ideologies, in definitive socio-historical contexts (Anderson & Holloway, 2020), underpins my study's theoretical foundation. The approach also focuses on the gaps and silences in policy discourse (i.e., the way that a range of other matters are not mentioned, thereby furtively implying that these issues are undeserving of attention or are unproblematic) (Bacchi, 2009).

Recognising the government's role in shaping directions and maintaining social order through the policy process, Foucault (1986, pp. 12–13, cited in Bacchi, 2009, p. 34) stresses that discourses incorporate the "rules, opinions, and advice on how to behave as one should", representing a "framework of everyday conduct". These are directives that permit certain statements to be made and not others, and, as Foucault (1994a) emphasises, are unconscious and unexamined, so people do not know where the statements came from, what they actually mean, what they produce, or why they were affirmed and promulgated. The power of discourse lies in its ability to provide validity for privileging some types of knowledge over others.

From this standpoint, Bacchi (2009) maintains that discourse within a government policy is legitimised as a source of truth when officially validated by the state. This type of discourse holds a position of privilege, as the knowledge presented in government policy documents becomes entrenched due to the state's authority. This authority specifically manifests through policy solutions incorporated into legislation, reports, and governing tools (Bacchi, 2009). Consequently, as such discourse becomes normalised and perceived as the natural way of thinking or acting, it becomes increasingly difficult to conceptualise alternative paradigms or modes of existence.

2.5 Power and resistance

An examination of the Foucauldian concept of discourse is incomplete without discussing the notion of power. As Jackson and Mazzei (2022) explain, Foucault challenges the idea that power is a possession that is exercised by individuals, groups, and institutions for the purpose of dominating or manipulating others. Rather than a top-down, intimidatory approach to power, Foucault (1978) re-envisions power as a productive force, noting that individuals, groups, or institutions cannot exercise power in their own right, but can act as channels for it (Bourke & Lidstone, 2015; Mills, 2004).

Consequently, instead of asking who holds power and where it comes from, Fejes and Dahlstedt (2012) contend attention needs to be placed on asking a 'how question' of power, thereby facilitating the examination of how power is exercised, under what conditions, and to what effect. In line with this reasoning, power does not operate from a single centre, rather, power is ubiquitous; it is relational, and it circulates (Rose et al., 2006). As such, power relations are not static but are constantly developing and transforming. Acknowledging that power circulates within a net-like organisation, Foucault (1978) advocates that it is possible to be simultaneously powerful and powerless.

These points are captured in Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach, where attention is directed to power circulating in all social relations, as a productive force that constructs, but is also limiting. This aligns with the view that power is neither negative nor repressive, as expressed by Foucault (1977):

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (p. 194)

From a Foucauldian position, power and knowledge are intrinsically linked and cannot exist without each other. Danaher et al. (2000) outline how there can be no recognisable forms of knowledge or truth without the exercise of power, while power itself is a function of knowledge and truth. As a result, an individual's knowledge is impacted by dominant forms of knowledge production (i.e., power struggles occurring between different groups and institutions affect which types of knowledge production are considered definitive and valid, which determines what knowledge is circulated as truth) (Mills, 2003, 2004). Some writers (refer, for example, Cheek, 2008; Danaher et al., 2000; Mills, 2003) contend that the information available to individuals is influenced by institutional interests and is therefore political (i.e., it is never neutral). Consequently, knowledge validates how power is exercised through institutions and groups.

Foucault (1980, p. 131) advocates that "truth isn't outside of power, or lacking in power … each society has its own regime of truths", which are in an ongoing contest to determine what is right or wrong. Whitworth and Carter (2014) conclude this contest is a process where regimes of truth and rationalities are continuously being defined and redefined. Accordingly, what is considered valid knowledge is contingent on which regimes of truth are in force at a given time and in a specific place. As Vesterberg (2016) reminds, regimes of truth that gain validity reward those who speak that particular truth.

As the elements of discourse (power and knowledge) are interdependent, they complement one another and occur together. In reconceptualising the term discourse to denote something that is inherently related to the operation and effects of power, Foucault (1980) highlights this interconnection as power perpetually generating knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly producing the effects of power.

Bacchi (2009, p. 38, emphasis in original) submits that "if power is *productive* rather than *possessed*, we need to study how it operates and what it produces rather than talking about who holds 'it'". Maintaining that power can be productive because it enables change, Foucault (1978) recognises it is also omnipresent, a web-like structure that is evident in day-to-day social practices (i.e., power is everywhere and circulates through discourse).

Tracking the effects of discourse enables the examination of both the mechanisms and functions of power, together with the points of resistance within power relations. Foucault (1978) determines that where there is power, there is also resistance, or the possibility of resistance. Accordingly, Foucault (1980, p. 84), using the term "insurrection of knowledges", asserts that power works in consort with resistance; that is, the presence of power depends upon the presence of multiple points of resistance. As a result, resistance is an elementary structural feature of power.

As power flows and is produced in social relations, there are always opportunities for resistance. Highlighting how a Foucauldian approach to resistance diverges from a position of overthrowing or seizing something in order to enact beneficial change, Lilja and Vinthagen (2018) note that points of resistance engage in 'counter conduct', whereby individuals may conduct themselves differently through other people, goals, or methods to undermine relations of power. Similarly, McKee (2009) details how resistance is enmeshed in governing, as it acts to pull against or counter dominant governing approaches.

Notwithstanding the contention of commentators (e.g., Francis, 1999; Oksala, 2016) that power is too pervasive for any resistance against it to be meaningful and effective, Foucault (1980) maintains that resistance to power can be realised by questioning, challenging, and disrupting institutional norms that are taken-for-granted. In this way, Pickett (1996) argues that resistance can act as a powerful tool for political and social change.

Based on the relationship between power and discourse, it is necessary to unpack how some discourses are prioritised, while other discourses are disavowed and marginalised. Advising that a profusion of practices operate in different settings to validate one discourse over another, Foucault (1980, 1991a) refers to these as discursive practices that have effects, which are discussed in the next section.

2.6 Discursive practices

Discursive practices define the rules directing how knowledge is formed and produced (i.e., how saying or knowing certain things is made possible), within a given time and space, and across different sites (e.g., social, economic, geographical) (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014). Moreover, discursive practices are mechanisms that work to institute 'regimes of truth' (knowledge), which Foucault (1980, p. 233) defines as "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power [are] attached to the true".

Based on the key premises of post-structuralism, my conceptual framework draws on the discursive relationships of knowledge, truth, and power. I employ Bacchi and Bonham's (2014) understanding of the Foucauldian application of discourse as pertaining to knowledge rather than to language. This means that my analysis does not focus on patterns of speech, but instead views discourses as practices.

Referring to discursive constructions that contain a regime of truth, Foucault (1980) points out that there is no paramount truth to be understood, only many different constructed truths that are constantly competing for viability through the practices of individuals. Therefore, discourses validated within discursive fields (such as education) reinforce and maintain the field's truths and power relations, generating an authoritative agreement about what needs to be done and how it should be accomplished (Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2016). Foucault (1980) describes the political component of a regime of truth as incorporating practices of power that are responsible for producing rules that organise and guide behaviour.

Regimes of truth are often so ingrained in day-to-day living that they are unseen. Consequently, people are generally unaware of the effects that discursive practices have on their thoughts and behaviour (McCloskey, 2008). For example, the discourse of parent-school relations can be identified as a collection of truths, including that parent-school engagement is advantageous, that parent-school involvement was deficient in the past but is considerably better now, and that the interests of parents and schools, or parents and policymakers, are aligned. These truths provide a set of officially sanctioned norms that govern the behaviour of parents and schools, and accordingly influence how the parent-school connection is understood, discussed, and managed.

This position suggests that embedded assumptions about the parent-school relationship may make it difficult to consider different options, as demonstrated in McHoul and Grace's (1993, p. 34, emphasis in original) assertion that "what we can *imagine* (let alone put into practice) is both permitted and constrained by the discursive … possibilities at our disposal".

It is frequently asserted that Foucault envisaged a domain external to discourse, a sphere of 'real' material relations which he termed non-discursive domains, practices, or relations (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014). For instance, Foucault (2002, p. 68, emphasis in original) expressly references "the *function* that the discourse under study must carry out *in a field of non-discursive practices*". Many consider that Foucault's differentiation between discursive and non-discursive practices, as exemplified in this statement, establishes a dichotomy between language and materiality (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014).

Advancing this interpretation, Barad (2003) advocates for the integration of 'material' into Foucault's conceptual framework of discursive practices, thus leading to the notion of 'material discursive practices'. However, considering that discourse in Foucauldian terms relates to knowledges rather than to language, Foucault's references to non-discursive domains (or practices or relations) denote areas not defined as knowledge formations. His understanding of discursive practice(s) is fundamentally material. Therefore, adding 'material', as suggested by Barad (2003), is unnecessary and, as Bacchi and Bonham (2014) contend, would inadvertently reinforce the ideal-real separation that Foucault aimed to overcome.

Foucault (2002) underscores the importance of examining non-discursive domains (areas not explicitly recognised as knowledges), specifically to understand the interplay between these domains and particular knowledges. According to Foucault (2002), archaeology reveals connections between discursive formations, which he conceptualises as constructs of knowledge rather than mere texts or speech, and non-discursive domains, such as institutions, political events, economic practices, and processes.

2.7 Subject positions, subjectivity, subjectification

As outlined in the previous section, within a Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist paradigm, a discourse is not what is said; rather it is a set of rules prescribing what is acceptable and 'normal', what is right and wrong (Bacchi & Bonham, 2014). These discursive rules construct subjectivities, or subject positions (i.e., shaping and limiting conceptions of who and what people believe they can become). As a result, individuals position themselves in various roles, at different times, in diverse places; contingent on the discourses that are in play. Notably, while individuals adopt subject positions, they can also challenge and disrupt them.

Whereas structuralism suggests that subjectivity represents an unchangeable or 'real' self, post-structuralism considers subjectivity to be multifaceted, fluid, and determined by different overlapping contexts (Peters & Burbules, 2004). Therefore, from a post-structuralist perspective, subjectivity broadly refers to the conception that the self (or the subject) is fragmented and contradictory (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008).

Foucault's (1987) conceptual approach looks to understand the relationship of power that makes particular knowledges (truths) and ways of being (subjectivities) identifiable as true, while simultaneously marginalising other knowledges and subjectivities as invalid, deficient, or erroneous. When individuals are framed according to what are regarded as normative truths, it is part of a subjectification process whereby the individual is shaped into a specific subject with particular characteristics (de Souza & Furlan, 2018). According to Foucault (1987), subjectivity is neither free nor independent of power.

When systems of power deem certain positions are preferential to others (i.e., imbued with more power), individuals work on themselves through practices of subjectification (i.e., through self-regulation and transformation; a right and wrong way of doing things) (Ullman & Ferfolja, 2016). Subjectification allows for reflection on how power-knowledge acts on individuals, and how individuals negotiate subject positions (e.g., adopt or disrupt). Accordingly, the subject positions with certain characteristics assigned to individuals, in a continuum from normal to abnormal, play an important role in the type of modification activities that the individual is exposed to in order to change, based on current societal norms and values (Downing, 2008). As a result, by producing specific subjects, it is also possible to control them through the subjectification process.

Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) draw attention to discourses that become dominant, and which silence and disallow other discourses. Referred to as subjugated knowledges, Foucault (2003, p. 7) uses the term to emphasise local knowledges that have been "kept in the margins" (e.g., knowledges that have been disqualified as non-conceptual, insufficiently elaborated, ingenuous, inferior, below the required level of scholarship). Consequently, as power resides within social relations (Foucault, 1978), any belief or ideology (e.g., neoliberalism) is dormant until it is embodied by individuals, who then enact it. Only then do the subjectivities that absorb and enable the knowledges used by power, take on the ability to exert control over others (i.e., subjugate individuals). Bacchi (2009, p. 36) maintains that subjugated knowledges, when applied to policy, provide "points of rupture" to challenge established knowledges, thereby initiating space for contestation.

2.8 Technologies of power

Foucault (1991, cited in Bacchi, 2009, p. 28) recognises power as a triangle of rule, encompassing sovereignty, discipline, and government (governmentality). Underscoring that the three systems of power are closely connected, Foucault (2007) emphasises the need to examine the systems separately, as well as in relation to each other. While more general in nature, the term technologies of power refers to systems of power, whereas the term techniques of power is specific, focusing on concrete interventions and activities directed at particular populations.

The form of power associated with the technology of sovereignty is primarily linked to institutions such as the legal system and central government (Downing, 2008). As such, the judiciary is one of the key tools within this system of power. The power of sovereignty is based on a top-down monarchical model where corporal punishment is employed to discipline individuals who oppose the governing body. For example, through the use of torture or execution, the visibility and effectiveness of the sovereign's power is stated (Downing, 2008). However, this form of power does not simply rely upon the sovereign to install fear in the population in order to prevent laws being violated. It also depends on the compliance of individuals, who have to agree with the rulings handed down (Wallenstein, 2013). Specifically, the population has to submit to this system of control in order to ensure that the methods operate effectively.

Foucault (1977) affirms that the corporal punishment method of control lost validity when 'lower ranked' groups within the population questioned and challenged the power of the sovereign. Consequently, the penal enforcement system was modified, from harsher models of punishment to more moderate control measures (Foucault, 1977). Emanating from this change was the emergence

of another form of power, the power of discipline. The technology of discipline is central to understanding some of the key techniques of power embedded in the Tomorrow's Schools policy (for example, 'dividing practices' whereby some (marginalised) groups are placed and contrasted in opposition to other (mainstream) groups).

The objective of disciplinary power is, as Foucault (1977, p. 82) asserts, "not to punish less, but to punish better; to punish with an attenuated severity perhaps, but in order to punish with more universality and necessity; to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body". Accordingly, the intention is not to use corporal punishment to ensure compliance, but rather to use the power of discipline to require the population to govern themselves. The power dimension embedded in the technology of discipline is less visible in its structure and methods, but more advantageous in producing manageable and compliant individuals (Wallenstein, 2013). The principal objective within this power system is to correct, improve, and, ultimately, create exemplary individuals (Foucault, 2007).

Foucault (1977) pinpoints three core techniques of disciplinary control: hierarchical observation, normalising judgement, and examination. Foucault (1977) explains that hierarchical observation, which is an ever-present, silent mechanism, is a technique of control and enforcement employed to discipline individuals and direct them towards preferred behaviours. What differentiates hierarchical observation from surveillance is that rather than there being one preeminent authority in charge of oversight (which is considered impossible), the responsibility for monitoring is distributed between several authority figures, who are strategically placed at lower to higher levels to remit observed information (Hall, 2001). Foucault (1977) uses an analogy of the panopticon (an institutional building with an inbuilt control system) to demonstrate how prisoners, who, never certain if they are being observed by the guards or not, are constantly mindful that they are potentially being watched.

Hierarchical observation fosters a normalising judgement, through which an individual's behaviour is evaluated and judged according to prescribed societal standards and values. This involves a range of possible behaviours predicated on degrees of assumed normalcy (e.g., good/normal, bad/abnormal) (Hall, 2001). In this regard, the mechanism of normalisation rewards an individual who presents optimal behaviour, while at the same time punishing any behaviour that deviates from the criterion. Consequently, an individual's ability and disposition is measured and ranked, and then compared to 'normal' or 'correct' behaviour types (Hall, 2001). Foucault (1977) maintains that, as an effective instrument for social control, normalisation establishes uniformity amongst individuals, whilst also defining differences in how well individuals conform to regulations.

Finally, the third stage in the disciplinary system is examination, which tests the knowledge gained through a combination of hierarchical observation and normalising adjudication (Foucault, 1977). This examination is dualistic. The first goal is to recognise what an individual under observation knows and to what extent they adhere to societal norms. The second objective, if the individual has failed to live up to prescribed standards, is to take control of the individual's behaviour so that they follow specified actions in terms of transformation and reform.

Governmentality differs from sovereign and disciplinary power, whereby an individual's ability to act is constrained or limited. In contrast, as discussed in the next section, Foucault (1997) contends that governmentality involves on the one hand, the act of governing individuals, and on the other hand, specific techniques of self-governing.

2.9 The 'rationality of government' (governmentality)

Studies of governmentality frequently commence with Foucault's (2008, p. 186) assertion that governmentality constitutes the art of "how one conducts the conduct of men". In further elucidation, Foucault (1982) clarifies the nuanced understanding of the term 'government' in relation to the concept of governmentality:

> This word must be allowed the very broad meaning it had in the sixteenth century. 'Government' did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or groups might be directed – the government of children, of souls, of communities, of the sick … to govern , in this sense, is to control the possible field of action of others. (p. 221)

Bacchi (2009) explains that the purpose of questioning policy, within a post-structuralist framework, is to provide space for reflecting more broadly on how governing takes place. In this study, I draw on Foucault's (1982) conceptualisation of governmentality as both a type of power and a recognition of the practices that allow governing to take place, not as a collection of ideologies, but as forms of rationalities and strategies.

Foucault's (1991a, p. 92) interest is in the "art of government", particularly how subjects are governed, regulated, and formed into subjects. Although the term government is usually recognised as the state governing people through laws, Foucault (1982, cited in Ferreira, 2009, p. 611) defines government using the term 'conduct of conduct' to describe a form of interrogation into "how we think about and

seek to govern our own conduct and the conduct of others". The 'conduct of conduct' play on words depicts governing as an activity that guides or directs (conduct as a verb) the behaviour or activity (conduct as a noun) of someone or something. Governing is consequently realised not only through mechanisms such as government policy, but via multiple strategies, technologies, and programmes designed to shape social rules and regulate behaviour (Edwards & Fernandez, 2017).

Governmentality encompasses the rationalities or 'mentalities of rule', which describe the intentions of governmental plans and programmes; and the actual practices or technologies through which processes of governing are made functional (Edwards & Fernandez, 2017). Technologies can include everyday programmes, systems, documents, and procedures (e.g., the school charter, education policies, pedagogical strategies) through which authorities seek to embody and give effect to governmental objectives (Dean, 2010). Accordingly, technologies of government entail an array of organisations, people, practices, and strategies to make government possible.

Governing technologies support the production and maintenance of certain knowledges as 'true', embedding them in social structures as normal and rational, while excluding alternative truths from being (easily) communicated (Bacchi, 2012). The objective in examining the process in which this occurs, and to uncover the assumptions and gaps in knowledge that underpin governing, thereby enabling possible alternative understandings to emerge, is described by Foucault (2007, p. 47) as "the art of voluntary insubordination … the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power, and question power on its discourses of truth".

Identifying and analysing governmental rationalities enables the probing of what Foucault (1994, p. 456, cited in Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 21) terms the "unexamined ways of thinking". Specifically, governmental rationalities render certain beliefs logical, along with making the policy developed to address a designated 'problem' appear thinkable and understandable to both professionals and the lay person. This thinking is discursively constructed, enabling discourse to determine "the conditions of possibility" for seeing governing in certain ways, which subsequently affects how governing is operationalised (i.e., made practical) (Carmel & Harlock, 2008, p. 157).

2.10 Neoliberalism as governmentality

For Foucault (2008), neoliberalism is a form of governance (i.e. a way of governing populations), a new regime of truth, and a political rationality underpinning dominant discourses and practices. Correspondingly, Larner (2000) argues that neoliberalism can be viewed in three ways: as a political

framework, an ideology, or a governmentality. I found that looking at neoliberalism from the standpoint of governmentality to be a useful exercise.

Integral to unpacking neoliberalism as a mode of governmentality is the examination of rationalities, technologies, and effects in order to understand how neoliberalism applies to different individuals and across different spaces. In considering the limitations of viewing neoliberalism as a policy framework or ideology, Larner (2000, p. 16) points to the necessity of engaging in the "messy actualities of new forms of governance", making visible the challengeable, inconsistent, and complex forms of government that define neoliberalism. To this end, Foucault (2008) employs two prominent concepts to scrutinise how neoliberalism operates as a form of governance: political rationality (concerned with forms of reason: ideas) and political technology (concerned with specific techniques or mechanisms of governance: practices).

Moreover, maintaining that governmental actions often generate outcomes that are contradictory, Li (2007) proposes that, through the combined examination of programmes, practices, and effects, the complexities of neoliberalism can be disentangled. This, according to Li (2007, p. 9), assists in clarifying how programmes hold value; allowing consideration of where gaps, ruptures, and fragilities exist, and what happens when governmental actions "hit the ground" when the 'problem' is not fixed.

Brown (2006) underscores that neoliberalism refers to more than a package of free-market principles, noting that it is a means of shaping subjectivity (i.e., a force that governs individual behaviours and attitudes). Foucault (2008) attests that individuals govern themselves and that this self-governing integrates with how they are governed by others, with the contact point between the two being 'government'. In noting Foucault's (2008, p. 226) claim that neoliberal governmentality encourages an individual to become "an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself", Read (2009) outlines how a person comes to be a business of one, who, in having to invest in their future, is constantly endeavouring to pursue their own self-worth and solve problems through their own development.

Another component of neoliberal governmentality is the idea of freedom; namely, the responsibility to be free. As Rose et al. (2006, p. 91) explain, "freedom, as choice, autonomy, self-responsibility, and the obligation to maximise one's life as a kind of enterprise, is a principal strategy of neoliberal governmentality". Specifically, an individual is positioned as free and autonomous, with an obligation to recognise their potential through self-regulation (Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1999). The concept of having autonomy consequently shapes an individual's thinking so that they view their life as a result of their own choices. This links to the core concept of responsibilisation, whereby individuals assume responsibility for fundamental issues, with all areas of their life framed as an outcome of individual choice.

When attention is given to what Larner (2000, p. 16) refers to as the "messy actualities" of neoliberal governmentality, through the examination of rationalities, technologies, and practices, the cracks within neoliberalism can be revealed and challenged. As discussed below, an effective means of determining different forms of governmental technologies and rationalities is through the identification and examination of the 'problem' representations in education policy discourse.

2.11 'Problem' representation (problematisation)

The concept of problematisation is central to my study's framework. Originally presented by Freire (1972, cited in Montero, 2009, p. 80) as "a strategy for developing a critical consciousness", problematisations are considered practices that interrogate and disrupt taken-for-granted truths. According to Freire (1972, p. 132), this objective is accomplished through the identification of "myths fed to the people by the oppressors" as 'problems'. Foucault also uses the concept of problematisation, defining it as a mode of thinking embedded within existing practices (Lemke, 2013).

In a Foucauldian-influenced, post-structuralist analysis, problematisation is understood in two ways (Deacon, 2000). First, Foucault (1977, p. 185) employs the term problematisation to explain his method of analysis, which he calls "thinking problematically". This involves examining how a 'problem' is questioned, categorised, and controlled within a specific time and context. Second, the term refers to the process through which "certain things (behaviour, phenomena, processes) become a problem", and are constituted as objects of thought (Foucault, 1985, p. 115). For example, the parent-school partnership is framed as a 'problem' in a particular way, within a specific socio-political setting, leading to its social acceptance as a self-evident issue. This partnership does not inherently exist as an object of thought but rather emerges through established practices, such as educational policy and expert discourse (Bacchi, 2012).

When something has circulated within a population for a sufficient period of time, its 'truth' becomes innate, and it is regarded as common-sense. Accordingly, part of examining a problematisation involves stepping back from that which appears common-sense and asking how it has 'become'. The notion that a social 'problem' (such as poverty, crime, racial inequality) 'becomes', interrupts the established understanding of issues as objective and unchanging (Bacchi, 2012). By studying the way in which issues come to be thought of as problematic, a critical analysis is initiated, which has the capacity to deactivate systems of thought that are considered to be irrefutable.

In this regard, studying problematisations allows consideration of the contexts, practices, historical events, and relations that contribute to the construction of phenomena as solvable 'problems'. Furthermore, it illuminates the subsequent formation of these phenomena into distinct objects of thought within practical frameworks, such as policy documents, regulatory mechanisms, or specialist reports (Bacchi, 2012). Examining how an object emerges through the process of problematisation enables its presupposed natural standing to be questioned, and assists in uncovering the strategic relations, specifically the underlying political considerations, that advance its development as an object commonly accepted as the truth (Bacchi, 2012).

Importantly, problematisations are not used to reveal hidden meanings or fabrications, but rather are employed to disclose "what is so obvious and so superficial that it is passed over and accepted without further comment" (Deacon, 2000, p. 129). Foucault (1985) suggests that by unpacking problematisations and practices, the thought behind 'problems' can be revealed, including indirect influences (e.g., the role of experts, values, ideologies) that shape how governing takes place.

One way a problematisation is presented by governments is through policy. According to Rose and Miller (1992, p. 181, emphasis in original), government "is a *problematizing* activity: it poses the obligations of rulers in terms of the problems they seek to address … the ideals of government are intrinsically linked to the problems around which it circulates, the failings it seeks to rectify, the ills it seeks to cure". Consequently, the 'problems' that governments deal with and the way they are represented in policies reflect underlying assumptions and normative concerns about the status of the population, along with projections of how the population should be. Bacchi (2009, p. 264) underscores this point by detailing that "we are governed through problematisations that influence who we are and how we think".

Using the term 'problem' representation to denote the form of a problematisation in a particular setting (the problematised phenomenon), Bacchi (2012) advocates that a 'problem' takes shape (or emerges) during the policy development stage, not in advance of it. From this position, Bacchi (2009) advises that it is possible to use policies as a springboard to access the problematisations through which governing occurs. As such, Bacchi's (2009) approach conceptualises government policy not as an endeavour to solve 'problems', but rather as an activity engaged in the production of 'problems'. It is linked to a broader theoretical agenda that focuses on understanding how governance takes place, providing insights into how representations of 'problems' impact the general public in terms of how they are governed.

2.12 Criticisms of post-structuralist thought

In the literature, reservations are expressed in relation to post-structural and/or Foucauldian methodologies. In this section, I identify commonly voiced limitations.

A particular criticism of post-structuralism is its underlying principle rejecting absolute forms of knowledge. Specifically, a post-structuralist position affirms that it is not possible to fix meaning in perpetuity, make generalisations, and to arrive at truth that is constant (Blaise, 2005; Cheek, 2008). From a positivist approach, the absence of absolutes is problematic, particularly in relation to generalisations (e.g., finding patterns, similarities, and differences across data; finding policy solutions that will work across a population). Post-structuralism refers to generalisations as 'grand narratives', which are effectively discourses that have become dominant, subjugating other discourses (Leavy, 2007).

Post-structuralists, therefore, do not focus on the efficacy of one discourse over another; instead, they examine the forms of knowledge that are produced and circulated by discourses (Howarth, 2013). In rejecting grand narratives and universal factors, post-structuralism considers that all discourses are relative to each other, and no one discourse is 'true' (Leavy, 2007). Referring to suggestions that because there are no conclusions about the nature of truth that can be formed, Francis (1999) and Oksala (2016) point out that some researchers propose this means there are no solutions to be disclosed and no ways of enacting change.

However, I argue the concern expressed regarding the divergence between assumed inconsistencies in applying meaning to post-structuralist research, and the need for generalisation in order for research to be effective, is unwarranted. The robustness of post-structuralism is its ability to examine power relations and aspects of resistance, while enabling a range of ideas to emerge. From my standpoint, while post-structuralism does not support grand narratives and universal factors, this does not mean that the use of post-structuralist analysis is passive and ineffective. Through post-structuralism's potential for more critical and nuanced considerations of texts (including policies), Elliot et al. (2016) note, from a Foucauldian perspective, a post-structuralist approach can be used to enact change, aimed at transforming, rather than liberating.

Another criticism of post-structuralism is targeted at its anti-humanism premise (Gavey, 1989; Weedon, 1997). In precis, post-structuralism relocates the importance of the self, submitting that humanism positions individuals as rational, stable, and active agents, who choose how to think, feel,

and behave (Olssen, 2003). Post-structuralists express doubt about agency, alternatively suggesting that individuals are formed by discursive cultural structures. This understanding recognises the constructed aspect of identity, whereby individuals are subject to contextual factors, rather than actively building identity (Olssen, 2003). Accordingly, the need to acknowledge how individuals and their experiences are constituted by discourse is underscored.

Contrary to the anti-humanist critique, I contend that post-structuralism does not seek to create an anti-humanist subject, but rather endeavours to reveal the illusory nature and processes that form what is considered 'real'. Davis (1997, p. 274) makes this point clear in her explanation that post-structuralism implies a "move from the self as a noun (and thus stable and relatively fixed) to the self as a verb, always in process, taking its shape in and through the discursive possibilities through which selves are made". In this post-structuralist understanding, the individual is viewed as the effect of power relations and processes of subjectification (Bonham & Bacchi, 2017).

Likewise, Foucauldian methodologies are criticised for employing what is described as a limited approach (Leavy, 2007). In this context, Dean (2015, p. 400) diverges from critiquing Foucault's strengths and weaknesses, noting that these are immaterial and that Foucault's concepts provide one understanding of the "different forms of power and domination ... [which] ... can be elaborated within a Foucauldian vocabulary but could also go further afield". Dean (2015) highlights other methods that can articulate a Foucauldian stance so that Foucault's work becomes the point of departure, not the final destination, for understanding 'problems' and problematisations.

Villadsen and Karlsen (2012) discuss Foucault's limited interest in examining general structures, noting instead his focus on distinct areas and micro politics. The often voiced criticism that Foucault's concepts are too localised and context specific is exemplified in Taylor-Gooby's (1994, p. 389) observation of post-structuralism's inadequate attention to broad themes and a focus on "a cloud of detail, [which] may ignore the wood through enthusiasm for bark-rubbing". Although Foucault does not start with broad themes, or the premise that they must be found, I argue that the application of Foucault's, and correspondingly Bacchi's, approach is receptive to determining comprehensive themes. For example, while Bacchi (2009) does not prescribe a specific expansive view, she guides the researcher to consider a wider contextual inquiry by asking **'**How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?' (as detailed in Chapter 6, genealogy).

As Ball (2010) reminds, in the same way as any theory, Foucault's thinking is partial and flawed. However, I submit that conceptual tools, like Foucault's, are necessary. As Gulson & Parkes (2010, p. 78) explain, such tools work as a "disruptive force", opening up new possibilities of thinking beyond the limits proffered by those with power. Foucault (1975, cited in Patton, 1979, p. 115) emphasises

this position, acknowledging that “all my books ... are little tool-boxes ... if people want to open them, to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power … so much better!”.

Foucault’s perspective offers a lens through which to understand the world, a lens which, as Hartman (1990, p. 3) contends, “adds another dimension to our view of the world”. It is important to recognise that post-structuralism is not a singular construct, but rather encompasses a multitude of diverse ideas and methodological approaches that have substantially expanded the scope of educational policy research. Consequently, a plethora of theoretical frameworks have emerged. Among these are indigenous paradigms, which contribute culturally specific knowledge systems and challenge dominant Western perspectives; and psychoanalytic approaches, which explore the unconscious factors influencing policy development and implementation, focusing on desire, subjectivity, and power relations.

Additionally, actor-network theory conceptualises policy as a dynamic outcome of interactions between human and non-human elements, emphasising the relational and contingent aspects of policy networks; science and technology studies examine the influence of scientific knowledge and technological objects on shaping policy agendas and outcomes, with particular attention to the socially constructed nature of facts and technologies; and new materialism underscores the agency of matter and the interconnectedness of human and non-human entities, thus providing new ways of understanding policy as both embodied and materially influenced.

2.13 ‘What is the Problem Represented to be?’ (WPR): A conceptual approach

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To operationalise the Foucauldian concepts presented in this chapter, I use a framework developed by the Australian academic Carol Bacchi (2009) called ‘What is the Problem Represented to be?’ (WPR). The WPR approach, simultaneously a practical and theoretical tool, extends Foucault’s work as an analytical strategy to examine the notion that all policy solutions rely on problematisations that can be opened up and studied, thereby providing space to stand back, deconstruct, question, challenge, and suggest alternatives. It is this potential to disrupt accepted paradigms and focus attention on the way that education policy operates as a process of government that resonates with me.

Bacchi (2009, p. ix) contends that policy is implicitly understood by the public as “a good thing, that it fixes things up”. However, in this ‘fixing’, it is understood that there is, or there was, a ‘problem’ (i.e., that something needs to be fixed). Underlying the position that policy is a method of problem-solving,

is the inference that 'problems' are external to the policy process and just need to be identified and responded to. This indicates a one-dimensional exercise, advancing from a 'problem' to a specific solution. Accordingly, WPR redirects the focus from the assumption that policy functions to resolve an extant 'problem', towards a way of thinking that sees policy as a process that constructs problems. In this context, Bacchi (2009) states that policy decisions can impede substantive debate because a perception is promulgated that the best solution to the 'problem' has been presented.

Bacchi's (2009) Foucauldian-influenced WPR approach is underpinned by four theoretical foundations (social construction theory, post-structuralism, feminist body theory, governmentality studies) that, collectively, provide a lens for problem-questioning. Bacchi's (1999) foundational scholarship, through which she developed and refined the WPR approach, focused on women, policy, and politics. In later work, Bacchi (2012) talks about the basis of the WPR approach in relation to Foucault's (1980) understanding of how knowledge exercises power and how power produces particular types of knowledge (i.e., knowledge exerts power or influence in shaping people's lives). The relationship between power and knowledge is, therefore, central to the WPR model, leading to the questioning of what knowledge is considered true.

Asserting that knowledge is a human construction (i.e., knowledge is not fixed, it is formed through people's actions and interactions), Bacchi (2009) observes that policymaking is a socially constructed meaning-making exercise that shapes particular understandings of 'problems'. Generally, as Weinberg (2014) points out, people are unaware of the constructed nature of these meanings, taking them for granted as being normal. As a tool to facilitate the discursive examination of education policy, Bacchi's (2009) model adopts a Foucauldian example of disrupting established perspectives about the meaning of policy and how governing takes place, with a key objective being to study, not people's views, but how it is possible for such views to exist. By conjecturing there is no value-free and uncontested concept or category, Bacchi (2009) directs attention to the political impacts affecting meaning, and how this meaning functions to determine and validate education policy and governing practices.

Consequently, embodying an understanding of education policy as a discursive structure responsible for producing power and knowledge, positioned within a web-like mechanism of circulating, relational power and resistance, Bacchi (2009) views knowledge not as truth, but rather what is accepted as truth. The WPR approach provides a systematic method for the identification and questioning of these truths or taken-for-granted (normalised) assumptions in education policy. Its practical application is enabled via a strategy constructed around a series of six questions, or lenses, which guide the analysis (Bacchi, 2009). These six questions are described in detail in Chapter 3.

2.14 Chapter summary

Chapter 2 presented the conceptual framework guiding this thesis. Beginning with the meaning applied to the term policy, the chapter detailed how the application of a post-structuralist lens more generally, and a governmentality framework more specifically, informs ways of thinking about and analysing education policy. Adopting a Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist position, the study's focus on discursive practices was explained.

A number of Foucault's key notions for understanding how power operates, with a particular emphasis on neoliberalism as a form of governance, were scrutinised. The chapter also examined policy-as-discourse to explore the processes of meaning-making and how they are influenced by political interests, power relations, institutional practices, and ideologies. Drawing guidance from these perspectives, education policy is viewed in this study as a discourse or knowledge framework, which is produced through a power-knowledge nexus, and is shaped by dominant ways of thinking in specific times and places.

Informed by the Foucauldian concept of problematisation, the chapter introduced Bacchi's (2009) 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach, which provides both a framework and a clear analytical method, drawing attention to the important role that policies play in shaping the 'problems' they seek to resolve. In the next chapter, the practical dimensions of the research process and methods for this study are discussed.

CHAPTER 3:

Methodology

I don't write a book so that it will be the final word;
I write a book so that other books are possible, not necessarily written by me.
(Foucault, cited in Kimutis, 2018)

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the core principles of the conceptual framework underpinning the thesis. Chapter 3 builds on these tenets, situating the study within a post-structuralist research paradigm and drawing on government documents as data.

In this chapter, I describe the method of analysis used; specifically, Bacchi's (2009) 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach. The components that constitute the WPR model are outlined, together with how Bacchi's epistemological framework and Foucault's theoretical tools are employed within WPR as a means for analysing the government texts. I clarify how Bacchi's (2009) approach is utilised in my study by linking the research questions, conceptual framework, and WPR model together.

Chapter 3 also details the research process operationalising the conceptual framework, and concludes with a brief note on the challenges I experienced in applying the WPR approach in this study.

3.2 Policy documents as the research data

A key decision taken in the study's design process was to focus solely on documents as the research data. I had considered the addition of interviews, or other qualitative methods, for gathering the perceptions of relevant stakeholders, as a means of expanding the analysis. However, my decision to

concentrate on government documents was a purposeful attempt to centre the 'problematising gaze' on to policy itself (Bacchi, 2009).

Burnham et al. (2008) direct attention to the notion that policy documents reflect the disputes, negotiations, and compromises that occurred during the policymaking stage. From this perspective, the policy document is understood to constitute a snapshot encapsulating the policy process. However, as Codd (1988, p. 238, citing Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1954) asserts, the premise that policy documents reflect the objectives of the policymaker(s), and that the documents are therefore evidence of these objectives, is "intentional fallacy". This fallacy is demonstrated when, following the examination of a document, it is assumed that the interpretation, implementation, or impact of a policy is unequivocally what the policymaker(s) intended. In effect, the policy document only depicts the decision-making process, or the official preferred record of events, and not the totality of the interactions initiated during the document's formation (Codd, 1988).

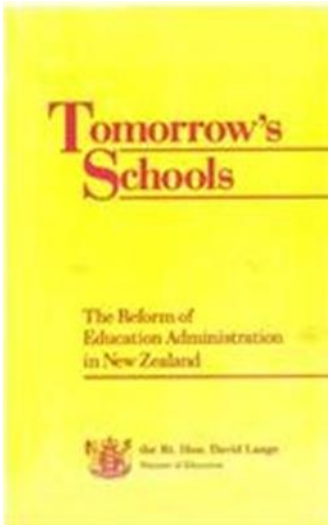
Gray (2022) confirms that because a range of meanings and understandings can be determined from any policy document, it is not possible to quantify which of these accurately represents the intent of the policymaker(s). Likewise, as policy documents contain contested meanings and values, privileging certain positions, while at the same time silencing others, Bacchi (2009, p. 36) understands policies as "institutionally sanctioned discourses". Accordingly, rather than employing a linguistic analysis, the WPR method uses documents as a way to examine how a 'problem' is framed (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). This assists in determining how concepts have emerged; for example, not from language as such, but from institutional practices, power relations, and social positions.

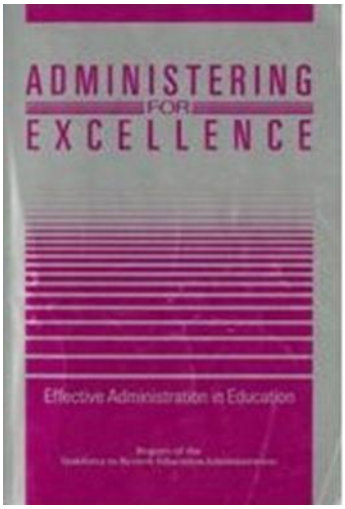
Bacchi (2009) affirms that policy documents are an example of Foucault's (1991a) suggested 'prescriptive texts' or 'practical texts', which provide instructions, viewpoints, or guidance on behaviour and social arrangements (i.e., how things should be done). In this regard, a prominent feature of the documentation used in a WPR analysis is its prescriptive nature; namely, that it can be understood generally as "a *form of proposal* and a guide to conduct" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 18, emphasis in original).

In the form of a proposal for change (solution), as shown in Figure 1, the government policy document *Tomorrow's Schools: The reform of education administration in New Zealand*, together with the government-appointed Picot Taskforce's ancillary report, *Administering for excellence: Effective administration in education*, represent points of entry for the study's WPR analysis.

Figure 1

The New Zealand Government's Tomorrow's Schools Policy Document and the Report of the Taskforce to Review Education Administration





In a policy document, the discussion of a 'problem' emanates from judgements and choices about how to present the 'problem' in a specific way to a public audience. As this means policy documents include interpretations, or representations, of 'problems', rather than objective descriptions, Bacchi (2009) recommends examining a range of subsidiary documents (e.g., procedures, regulations, reports, media statements) to gain a comprehensive account of the 'problem' representation(s) associated with the policy under review. A list of the secondary documents used in my study's analysis are provided in Table 2 (refer Section 3.5.1).

As most government policies are produced using a hierarchical structure, commencing with general and strategic statements and moving on to assemblages of more specific policy and direction, it is expedient to analyse policy within the context of the document as a whole, as well as in the contextual framework of other relevant government documents (Grant, 2022). This point is exemplified in the study's chapter on genealogy (Chapter 6), where contextualisation provides the opportunity to track the development of a concept, together with insights into the rationale and theoretical underpinnings of government policy. For example, tracking the issue of parent-school involvement/partnership from its emergence in government discussion, in the form of community meetings and government inquiries, through to subsequent reports, builds a picture of what ideas surrounding the issue have been discarded and what ideas have been consolidated.

Studies using pre-existing documents are considered to be what Grant (2022, p. 55) terms "ethically uncomplicated", especially if the documents are in the public domain and/or are historical in nature. Notwithstanding, Doney (2021) signals a growing awareness of ethical considerations in the use of documents as research data, including whether individuals referred to in texts should be viewed as participants, how confidentiality and anonymity factors need to be approached, particularly in relation to context, and the ethical effects of document selection and transcription. These points were a salutary reminder during the development of my study, along with Bacchi's (2021, p. 9, emphasis in original) reinforcement of an ethical approach, noting that as WPR addresses "*governmental* rather than *individual* problematisations", 'blame' should not be assigned to individuals.

3.3 The analysis of discourse as the research strategy

After defining the research data, I then looked at what type of analysis to employ. There is a comprehensive range of literature on different options (refer, for example, Bacchi, 2000; Browne et al., 2019; Fairclough, 2003; Fairclough & Fairclough, 2018; Hyatt, 2013), with the analysis of policy categorised into three broad types: traditional, mainstream, and interpretive (Browne et al., 2019; Yanow, 2000).

Browne et al. (2019) define traditional policy analysis as the examination of how, following the objective investigation of all possible outcomes, the 'best' solution was identified; while mainstream policy analysis draws attention to those involved in the policymaking process. The mainstream approach primarily considers policy from a top-down perspective, including how the policymaker's values and interests are embedded in the policy text (Browne et al., 2019). In contrast, interpretive policy analysis pays less attention to finding definite answers and more on the framing of 'problems', predicated on the position of the policy within wider socio-political contexts (Browne et al., 2019; Yanow, 2000).

Within the analysis of policy, various stances are taken, including critical realism, critical discourse analysis, post-structuralist policy analysis, and Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach. A positivist view sees the world as having absolute truths, which are measurable and have distinct cause and effect properties. Conversely, constructivists suggest that individuals seek understanding of the world, and that meanings are produced by individuals as they interact with the world that they are interpreting (Creswell, 2009). Critical realism, positioned between positivism and constructivism, assumes that there are measurable realities influenced by viewpoints, concepts, and mediating factors from history,

society, and politics (Creswell, 2009). Consequently, multiple realities exist. Building on a realist perspective, critical discourse analysis views both concrete social occurrences and abstract social structures as integral to social reality (Fairclough, 2010).

Using a critical discourse analysis approach with policy employs a 'policy-as-discourse' model, whereby how the policy has evolved and been developed becomes an essential component of the study (Bacchi, 2000). Discourse analysis, which includes Fairclough's (2010) prominent critical discourse analysis model, focuses on the linguistic tools used in the production of a text. In comparison, an analysis of discourse, as Bacchi (2005, p. 199) details, identifies, within a text, "institutionally supported and culturally influenced interpretive and conceptual schemas (discourses)", centring on broad and ingrained systems of meaning. Accordingly, Bacchi (2009) contends the WPR approach, based on its understanding of discourse, should not be categorised as a genre of critical discourse analysis.

Within a Foucauldian approach, there is no single model for 'doing' discourse analysis. Notably, Foucault (1994, cited in Graham, 2011) avoids prescription, stating that he is mindful not to dictate how things should be. Although acknowledging that circumscribing boundaries between theoretical positions can be an uncomfortable exercise, Bacchi (2005) considers it useful to distinguish an analysis of discourse from an emphasis on language or language use. To this end, Bacchi's (2005) differentiation between procedural concepts is integral: specifically, discourse analysis (emphasising patterns of speech) and analysis of discourse (focusing on how issues are given meaning within social settings).

From a Foucauldian perspective, examining discourse requires an approach that advocates the questioning of truth statements and the relationships that influence how knowledge is formed. Truth statements are often concealed, regularly taken-for-granted as being 'just the way it is', presented as objectively true, and subsequently left unexamined (Bacchi, 2009). For instance, Sweid (2020, p. 34) highlights the truth statement "a socially cohesive society is a healthy society". Such truth statements form the rationale that frames a discourse and therefore presents a 'problem' in a certain way (Bacchi, 2009).

An analysis of discourse establishes whether truth statements are obvious or hidden in document texts. By identifying and analysing these truth statements, questioning the assumptions and opacities that they are based on, and determining knowledge gaps, the discursive structure unfolds, providing opportunities for different understandings to emerge (Bacchi, 2009). The goal is not to invalidate or verify the authenticity of the statements, but to challenge assumptions and question how they have become entrenched ways of thinking.

Bacchi (2012) states that as all knowledge production involves power, all research is therefore political. Acknowledging this point, Ronnblom (2012, p. 122) declares that "methodology matters", asserting that researchers shape reality in the methodological choices they make. Therefore, my study's methodology is intended to contribute to thinking differently in order to disrupt and challenge particular understandings of policy 'problems', rather than simply accepting and relying on quantitative analysis. This objective highlights the underlying premise of Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach; expressly, what difference does it make if you look at it differently, if you construct it differently, and think about it differently?

3.4 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR): A method of inquiry

A key reason for engaging with the work of Bacchi (2009) is based on how the WPR approach foregrounds that a policy is not a 'thing' to be understood. For Bacchi (2018), the goal is to unravel ways of thinking to reveal why the policy provides the meaning that it does. Moreover, the WPR model allows for 'otherwise thinking' in the examination of how a 'problem' is established within policy, along with the practices that produce it, and the effects it generates (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). The aim is not to consider whether government policy is true, but how its connections to political decisions has what Bacchi (2009, p. 18, emphasis in original) designates as "effects *in the real*" (i.e., how government policies and the representations of specific 'problems', in particular contexts, impact on people's everyday lives).

Bacchi's (2009) WPR framework is configured as a practical, question-based methodological tool, directly applicable to document texts. Commensurate with post-structuralism's reluctance to treat research as a set of strict rules, Bacchi (2009) makes clear that the WPR approach is not prescriptive. For this reason, Goodwin (2011, p. 171) suggests that the WPR method should be viewed as a "conceptual checklist", rather than a sequential process. In noting that the WPR question cues overlap and interact, allowing insights from one of the six questions to inform the others, and vice versa, Bacchi (2009) outlines two applications of the model: systematic (addressing each WPR question separately and in order, as undertaken in my study), or integrated (the WPR questions are not listed in the text, instead being incorporated across-the-board).

There is an expanding international body of work employing Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach, encompassing, for example, education (Alfrey et al., 2021; Lomer, 2017; Loutzenheiser, 2015; Philip, 2019), health (Lancaster et al., 2015; Pienaar et al., 2018), young people (Jonsson et al., 2022; Komai, 2023); disability (Horsell, 2020), poverty (Pantazis, 2016), homelessness (Zufferey, 2014), food security (Bastian & Coveney, 2013), and equal pay (Saari, 2013).

Bacchi (2018) advises that the WPR approach can be effectively employed in areas not directly applicable to the analysis of policy, as the WPR framework is based on the premise that governing also occurs in non-governmental institutions. Additionally, analysis can be applied to occurrences that are not precisely textual and entities not found in formal documents, such as rituals (as spoken and acted text), organisational culture (as symbols), buildings, and the machinery of government (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Within this genre, a notable example is Lindberg's (2019) doctoral thesis on the constitutive power of maps in the Arctic. I found Lindberg's (2019) clear and concise application of Bacchi's WPR framework to be insightful and thought-provoking.

One issue I encountered while exploring Bacchi's (2009) model was that many writers described the six WPR questions in detail in their methodology sections, but then failed to apply the questions in their analyses. Bacchi (2021) concedes that in her original 2009 framework she advised that it was not necessary for every question to be addressed as the analysis would determine which questions were most applicable to the research. For example, the researcher could be interested in subjectification effects (WPR question five) of a selected policy, but not its genealogy (WPR question three). However, Bacchi (2021) acknowledges that she is now more circumspect about this advice as it overlooks the interconnected mode of thinking utilised in the WPR framework. Based on my experience, I strongly agree with this point.

Bacchi (2021) notes that some researchers consider the WPR method to be too loose (i.e., too obscure, too 'postmodern', not critical enough). In contrast, Bacchi (2021) observes that others describe the WPR method as being too critical (i.e., too precise, denunciatory). I contend that employing the WPR approach, as both a way of thinking and as an analytical tool, provides a clear roadmap for questioning issues categorised as common-sense and taken-for-granted, and for thinking differently and considering alternative possibilities.

In the following section, I summarise my study's implementation of the WPR approach, together with a brief account of the challenges encountered. First, I begin by outlining the WPR question prompts.

3.4.1 The WPR question prompts

Summarised from Bacchi (1999, 2009, 2011) and Bacchi and Goodwin (2016), the questions that comprise the WPR method, and their objectives, are as follows:

1. ***What is the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?***

   The first question is a clarification exercise. Instead of accepting that the 'problem' sits outside the policy process, the task is to work backwards from the solution provided (i.e., what issue has been determined, conceptualised, and framed as the basis upon which the solution is formulated). The goal is to reveal the problematisation that is implicit in the text. The identified 'problem' representation then becomes the focus of the rest of the WPR analysis.

2. ***What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?***

   The aim of question two is to identify, via a form of Foucauldian archaeology, the meanings that need to be in place for a 'problem' representation to be understood. Accordingly, the question considers how issues are shaped, the aspects of knowledge that assertions rely on, and the types of knowledge that are necessary for statements to be accorded perspicuity (i.e., what "unexamined ways of thinking" make it possible to see the 'problem' in a certain way) (Foucault, 1994a, p. 456). This exercise requires paying close attention to the key concepts, binaries, and categories that have been used to construct the 'problem' and give it meaning within the policy.

3. ***How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?***

   In scrutinising how knowledge becomes seen as truth, question three focuses on the historical and socio-political conditions that allow a problematisation to take shape and assume dominance. Bacchi (2009, p. 212) describes this as "tracking the emergence of a particular way of thinking". Employing a Foucauldian genealogical approach, the purpose is to uncover the developments and decisions that contributed to the 'problem' representation, and to identify specific points in time where some knowledges are promoted and others are silenced; thereupon taking an issue in a certain direction. The application of this question has the effect of destabilising contemporary 'problem' representations by questioning their taken-for-granted status.

4. ***What is left unproblematic in this 'problem' representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?***

   Shifting attention from what has been represented as the 'problem' to what has not been problematised, question four (a set of three questions presented together) examines the issues

and perspectives that are overlooked or silenced (i.e., absent, dismissed, marginalised), thereby promoting a practice of "thinking otherwise" (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 22). Revealing silences within policies, and making simplifications, aberrations, or misrepresentations explicit, enables a rethinking of the taken-for-granted construction of the 'problem', including determining if the 'problem' could be viewed in a different way.

5. ***What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?***

   Predicated on the notion that policymaking involves practices with real consequences, the fifth question supports the identification of the uneven effects problematisations have on different groups. This rationale is based on an understanding that some groups may benefit while others may be harmed by the way 'problems' are constructed. To this end, question five calls attention to the interrelated effects that are produced by the 'problem' representation; namely, the discursive effects (limiting what can be thought and said in relation to the 'problem'), subjectification effects (the processes that produce subject positions, with some groups seeing themselves as different to others), and lived effects (the material impacts on the lives of policy recipients).

6. ***How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated, and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?***

   The sixth and final question consists of two parts. The first examines the practices and processes that allow taken-for-granted truths to dominate and achieve validity in particular times and spaces. This includes how certain representations of the 'problem' are disseminated to their target audience and achieve authenticity (e.g., the role played by the media in transmitting and supporting problematisations). The second part of question six provides an opportunity for counteraction, by asking how dominant discourses can be re-problematised, or contested, with the goal of challenging 'problem' representations that are considered harmful.

Over the course of my analysis of the government texts, I used (as a reminder) a quick reference guide to the objectives of the WPR question prompts (refer Appendix A).

Acknowledging that "we are immersed in the conceptual logics of our era", Bacchi (2009, p. 19) stresses the need for the researcher to understand the part they play in generating and normalising specific ways of seeing and knowing. Consequently, the final phase of the WPR approach, which Bacchi (2009) calls Step 7, designates that I subject my own background, past experiences, preferences, and assumptions to the same rigorous examination that I have applied to my analysis of the government texts under study (i.e., a form of self-scrutiny by way of the six WPR questions).

In considering the need for self-problematisation, Bacchi (2009) highlights the importance of the researcher recognising that what they think should be done, and how their own proposals about what they regard the 'problem' to be, adds to the validation of certain truths. As Davies (1994, pp. 45–46, cited in Bacchi, 2009, p. 45) points out, "the viewer must catch themselves in the act of seeing in particular ways". This self-problematising step is detailed in Chapter 9.

3.5 Operationalising the WPR research process

Rather than viewing the study's methodology as a fixed sequence of steps, producing what Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe as a one-dimensional, logical, and planned process, my study's data collection and analysis followed a non-linear approach, entailing a continuous spiral of progression in light of new understandings. The outline of the research process that follows is a tidier version (in retrospect) of the actual process I undertook (for example, my data collection and analysis practices often overlapped, instead of being separate procedures).

Accordingly, in the context of my evolving understanding, the optic of a spiral provides a helpful visual representation of my research process; namely, a spiral of actions, involving a starting point; manoeuvring backwards, forwards and around; and proceeding inwards and outwards (and at times spiralling in the wrong direction).

3.5.1 Mapping the territory

The first phase of the research process involved deciding on the study's parameters. This task resulted in determining which text, or selections of text, would be the initial focus of the WPR analysis. In accordance with Bacchi's (2018, p. 7) advice, I concentrated on concrete practical texts (prescriptive texts), including any documents providing directives, rules, or guidelines on "how things should be". Bacchi's (2009) understanding of a practical text draws on the Foucauldian method of examining texts to show how issues are thought about, or problematised, and shaped by power relations. After completing an initiatory reading of the government texts, I commenced the process of "marking off and marking out territory for analysis" (Goodwin, 2011, p. 168). This work involved various moves.

First, moving backwards, I located material referenced within the Tomorrow's Schools document itself (e.g., Report of the Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). Second, moving outwards, I

collected ancillary texts (e.g., briefing papers provided to the Prime Minister and Minister of Education). Third, this task involved working through my early contextual reading, plus the initiatory citation directory I had established to identify a range of subsidiary material, including media statements, Ministers' speeches, parliamentary questions, presentations at conferences and meetings, and other central policy records. Table 2 and Figure 2 record the secondary documents used in the study's analysis.

During this exercise, a number of texts that I identified on first reading as relevant to the study were, when scrutinised in more depth, considerably lighter on detail than first thought. As such, deciding on whether or not to include texts in the analysis was an iterative process of examining and re-examining. In this regard, I took on board Shaw's (2010) recommendation to avoid setting a fixed list of documents in the initial stages of the WPR analysis because the final repository of texts evolves during the research process. Acknowledging Bacchi's (2009) prompt that the WPR approach encompasses a broad process, including a genealogical component (tracking backwards to find interrelated documents), I also followed Cort's (2011, p. 27) advice that the data gathering exercise is a "moving target".

Table 2

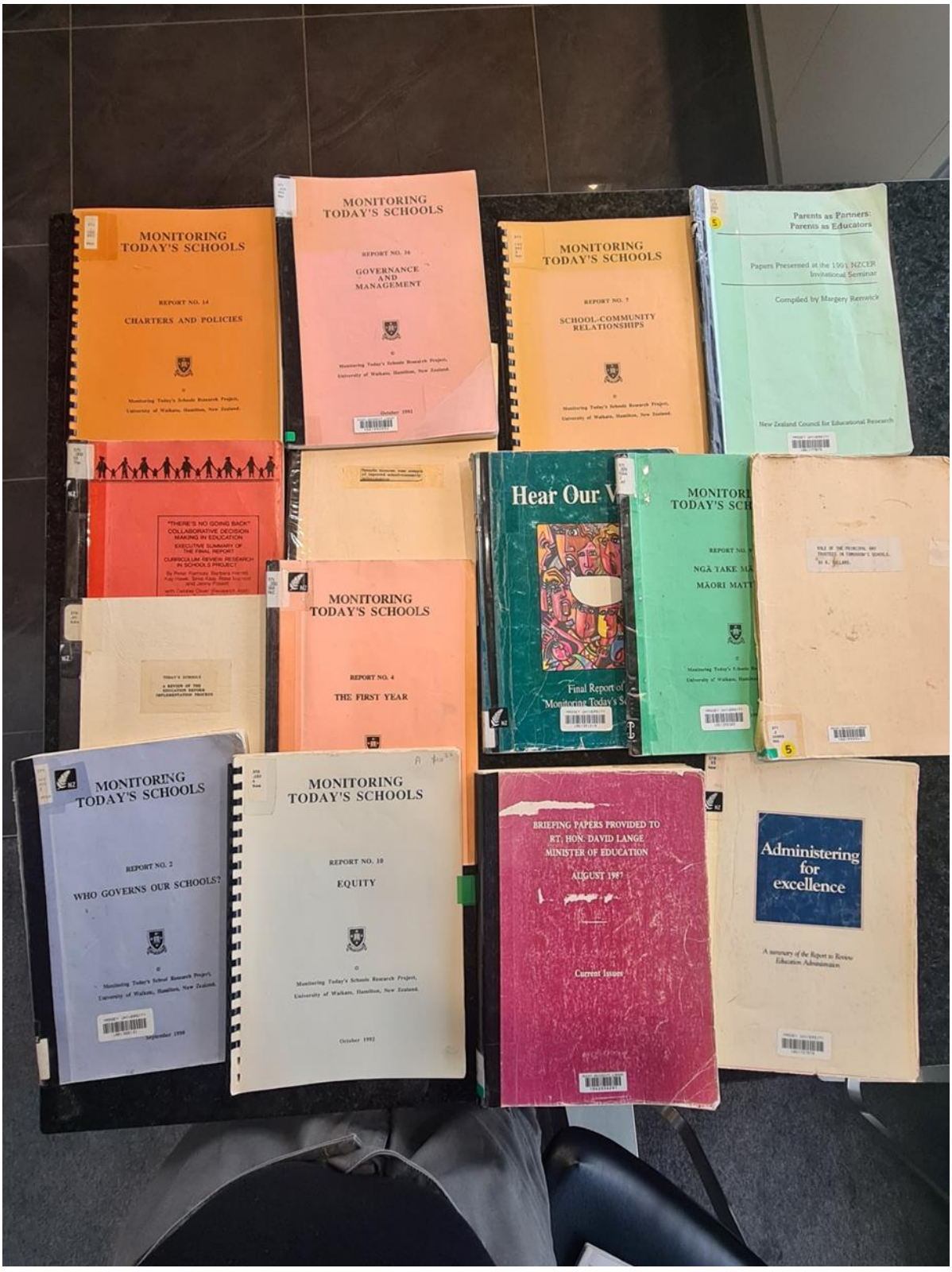
Secondary Documents Used in the Study's Analysis

Year	Document	Author
1984	Economic management: Brief to the incoming government	The Treasury
1987	Briefing papers provided to the Rt. Hon. David Lange, Minister of Education: Current issues	Department of Education
1987	Government management: Brief to the incoming government, Volume I	The Treasury
1987	Government management: Brief to the incoming government, Volume II: Education issues	The Treasury
1988	Administering for excellence: A summary of the report to review education administration	Department of Education
1989	Curriculum Review Research in Schools Project (Occasional Paper No. 5): Towards success: Some examples of improved school-community relationships	Education Department, University of Waikato
1989	Role of the principal and trustees in Tomorrow's Schools	Ballard, R., & Duncan, P. Implementation Unit, Department of Education

1990	Today's schools: A review of the education reform implementation process (prepared for the Minister of Education) (the Lough Report)	Education Reform Implementation Process Review Team
1990	'There's no going back': Collaborative decision-making in education: Curriculum review research in schools project executive summary of the final report	Ramsay, P., Harold, B., Hawk, K., Kaai, T., Marriott, R., & Poskitt, J. (University of Waikato)
1990	Monitoring Today's Schools Research Project Report No. 2: Who governs our schools? The educational perspectives of members of boards of trustees	Middleton, S., & Oliver, D. Prepared for the NZ Ministry of Education as part of a research contract between the Ministry and the University of Waikato
1991	Monitoring Today's Schools Research Project Report No. 4: The First Year: Tomorrow's Schools as perceived by members of boards of trustees, principals and staff after the first year	McConnell, R., & Jefferies, R. Prepared for the NZ Ministry of Education as part of a research contract between the Ministry and the University of Waikato
1992	Monitoring Today's Schools Research Project Report No. 7: School-community relationships	Harold, B. Prepared for the NZ Ministry of Education as part of a research contract between the Ministry and the University of Waikato
1992	Monitoring Today's Schools Research Project Report No. 10: Equity	Ramsay, P., & Oliver, D. Prepared for the NZ Ministry of Education as part of a research contract between the Ministry and the University of Waikato
1992	Monitoring Today's Schools Research Project Report No. 14: Charters and policies	Mansell, R. Prepared for the NZ Ministry of Education as part of a research contract between the Ministry and the University of Waikato
1992	Monitoring Today's Schools Research Project Report No. 16: Governance and management	Barrington, J. Prepared for the NZ Ministry of Education as part of a research contract between the Ministry and the University of Waikato
1993	Monitoring Today's Schools Research Project Report No. 9: Nga take Māori: Māori matters	Jefferies, R. Prepared for the NZ Ministry of Education as part of a research contract between the Ministry and the University of Waikato
1993	Hear our voices: Final report of Monitoring Today's Schools Research Project	Mitchell, D., McGee, C., Moltzen, R, & Oliver, D. Prepared for the NZ Ministry of Education as part of a research contract between the Ministry and the University of Waikato

Figure 2

Supplementary but Related Documents Orbiting the Study's Primary Texts



3.5.2 The coding exercise

Having assembled the documents to be used as the research data, my focus moved to coding the collected material. While Bacchi (2009) does not discuss the need for coding to support the method, others employing the WPR approach reference collecting data into templates while developing their research (e.g., Chan, 2020; Loughnane, 2016; Partridge, 2014).

Following Punch's (2005, p. 200) advice to "crack open the data", I examined the documents to unearth relevant information in the first phase of coding. I looked for key words and phrases used, including repetition (of similar phrases) and the positioning of important ideas; in addition to watching for what Bacchi (2009) describes as silences in the texts. Although the WPR approach is not a linguistic tool for the analysis of discourse, Bacchi (2011) suggests that attention to language, including recurring terms, can be a useful starting point for a WPR analysis.

After trialling qualitative data analysis software, I decided to proceed with a traditional by-hand coding system (e.g., underlining, highlighting, annotating text passages), with the relevant data assembled in a Word file. Although a programme such as NVivo would have accelerated the coding and retrieval processes, I found a manual approach suited my need to comprehensively understand the data. I started with reading documents, then detailing them within a table with two columns (one for text, the other for potential codes). Subsequently, these were placed into more detailed tables of categories and themes under each WPR question. Organising the categories that emerged after the initial reading of the documents, together with the many rounds of reading that followed, allowed me to assimilate the themes in the texts.

My objective in coding was to gather a substantial amount of information into themes connecting to the WPR framework. Accordingly, the application of word themes is used in the broader sense of the term, in relation to the process of bringing general categories and concepts together. For example, I collectively grouped common ideas under headings such as problems and solutions, knowledges and rationalities, genealogical links, omissions and silences, and effects and implications. Overall, this process involved exploratory analysis to break down the Tomorrow's Schools policy document, along with interacting texts, into themes that would act as a resource for the WPR analysis proper.

In my detailed coding exercise, I started the process by identifying preliminary sub-themes such as parental involvement, engagement, communicating, choice, decision-making, collaborating with the community, benefits of parental involvement, and barriers. These sub-themes were extrapolated from governmental texts and my prior research on parental involvement (e.g., Fernandez & Lopez, 2017; Lareau, 2011; Mapp, 2012; Saltmarsh et al., 2015).

Through iterative rounds of in-depth reading and analysis, these sub-themes were systematically aggregated into larger, overarching themes. For instance, the sub-themes of parental involvement, engagement, and communicating were amalgamated into a broader theme of 'Parental roles and contributions'. Similarly, sub-themes relating to choice, decision-making, and collaborating with the community were encompassed under the broader theme of 'Parental decision-making processes'.

An example of the consolidation of sub-themes into overarching themes is depicted in Table 3.

In parallel, I set up a research diary to record what I had analysed, which I then referred back to as my study progressed. Notations were used in summarising documents, highlighting key points or quotations as noteworthy. The diary ended up being spread across OneNote and numerous paper notebooks. As represented in Figure 3, my notes included annotations on information to follow-up on, coupled with useful observations for analysis ideas, as well as self-problematisation reflections.

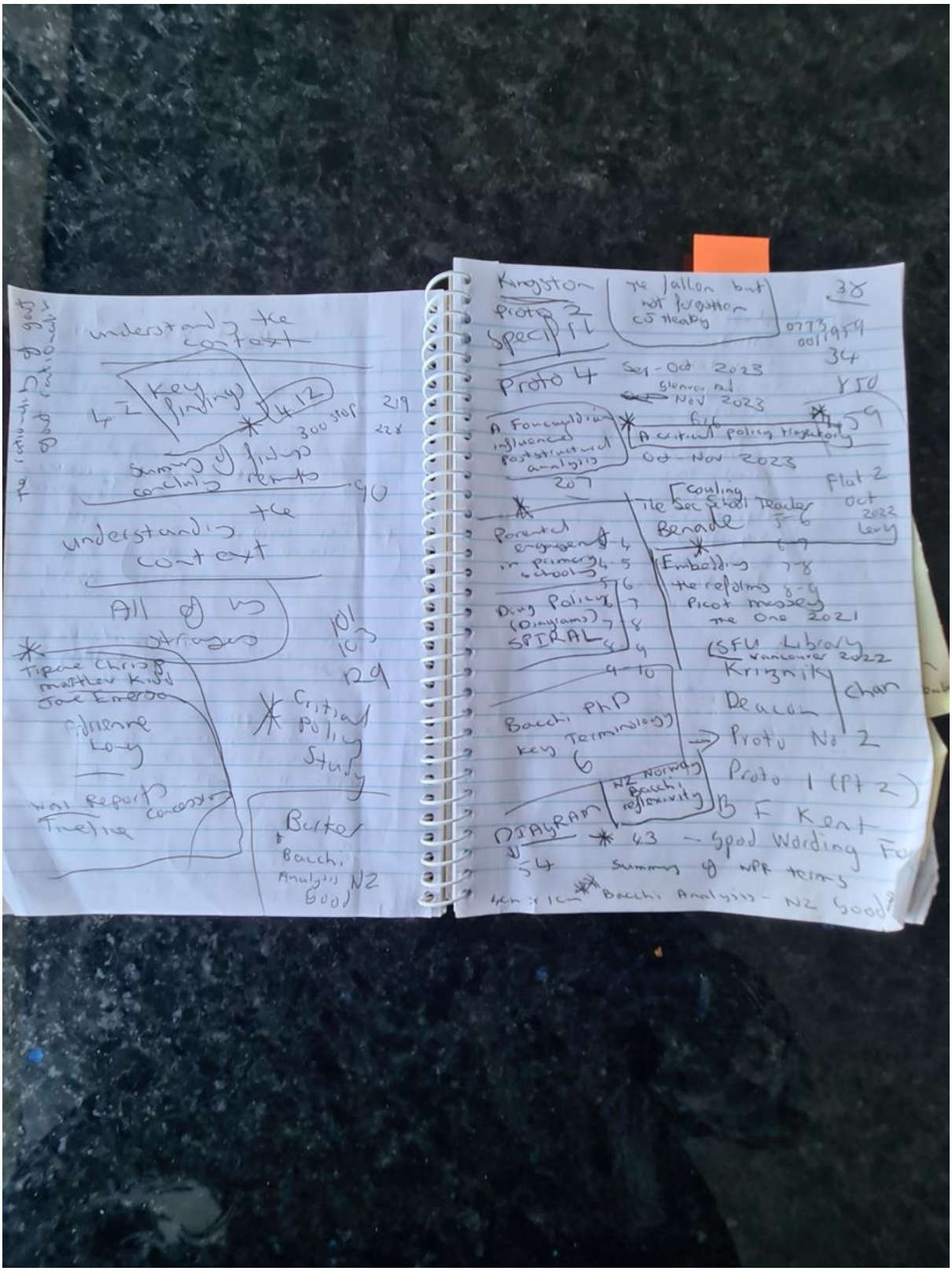
Table 3

Example of Initial and Overarching Themes

Initial sub-themes	Second level themes	Overarching themes
Involvement Engagement Communication	Home-based activities School-based activities Role of parents Role of schools	Parental roles and contributions
Choice Decision-making Community collaboration	Benefits of involvement Barriers to involvement	Parental decision-making processes

Figure 3

Example of Research Diary Notations



3.5.3 The second preparatory pathway

Foucault's published scholarship is considered to be challenging by some (see, for example, Cheek & Porter, 1997; Motion & Leitch, 2007; Powers, 2007). Congruently, in addition to the coding and analysis practices described above, I undertook a separate preparatory pathway. This involved reading a body of Foucault's work, particularly on power and knowledge. Bacchi's (2009) WPR model assists in translating theoretically-complex ideas (e.g., Foucault's notions of archaeology, genealogy, governmentality, subjectification) into what Goodwin (2012) appraises as straightforward, consequently rendering them accessible and germane. While Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach assists in making Foucauldian concepts applicable, it is not advanced as a replacement for specific understandings of Foucault's methodologies, which provide depth and complexity.

I supplemented my reading of Foucault's output with additional texts to expedite examination of the seminal Foucauldian concepts underpinning the methodological approach employed in my thesis. Table 4 lists the companion texts I used to understand how Foucault's notions correlate and form an analytical lens.

Table 4

Foucauldian Auxiliary Study Material

Publication	Author
Understanding Foucault	Danaher, G., Schirato, T., & Webb, J.
The Cambridge introduction to Michel Foucault	Downing, L.
The Cambridge companion to Foucault	Gutting, G.
Foucault: Power, knowledge and discourse	Hall, S.
A Foucault primer: Discourse, power and the subject	McHoul, A., & Grace, W.
Michel Foucault	Mills, S.
Michel Foucault	O'Farrell, C.
The Foucault reader	Rabinow, P.

My particular interest is in Foucault's (1982) themes of, and relationships between, knowledge, power, and the individual. His research methods seek to examine and determine the social background of knowledge and subjectivity, and the consequences of these processes. By examining the regimes of thought, or discourses in a specific setting, Foucauldian research focuses on identifying the knowledges and "ways of being, doing, and thinking" that dominate, and those that have been

marginalised (Dean, 1994, p. 54). In analysing the construction of existing (and past) truths, Foucault (2002) considers the ways in which certain knowledges and ways of being are produced in a particular situation, as being true or not. Accordingly, an important element of the research is not based on identifying one specific truth, but rather on opening up possibilities of other truths. As McHoul and Grace (1993, p. 27) recognise, Foucauldian methodology can be considered a critical approach "since it is geared towards a counter-reading of historical and social conditions and offers possibilities for social critique and renewal".

Allen (2012, p. 4) emphasises that Foucault did not consider his ideas should be thought of as rigid principles or theories, rather that his work be used as a "kind of tool-box from which others can extract those parts that are of use to them". When I encountered relevant Foucauldian concepts or quotations, I stopped to record the excerpt in my notes. This backwards and forwards between theory and topic occurred throughout all phases of my writing process, where I repeatedly returned to primary and secondary textual resources to check my understanding, to increase insight, or to make new connections. As my notes grew exponentially, I developed a directory of underpinning concepts for reference. An example page from my Foucauldian index is provided in Table 5.

Table 5

Example of the Foucauldian Directory

Governmentality	Power/Knowledge	Problematisation	Dividing Practices
Broadly refers to the different kinds of thinking associated with approaches to governing (e.g., neoliberal). Also used to describe a form of rule that emerged in the late 18th century as a way of administering populations. Foucault later expanded his definition to include techniques and procedures designed to govern the conduct of both individuals and populations at every level, not just the administrative or political level. This includes the notion of self-governing.	The power-knowledge nexus: The way power is involved in producing forms of knowledge, and in which knowledges exercise power or influence in shaping people's lives. Power (as productive): An understanding of power as a positive force that makes things happen. This view of power signals that we are not governed solely through restrictions; rather certain discourses make specific forms of rule and of being possible.	Foucault used the term problematisation in two ways: first, to describe his method for interrogating taken-for-granted assumptions; and second, to refer to the discursive and non-discursive practices that constitute something as 'an object for thought'. As policy proposals specify what needs to change, they are forms of problematisation, containing implicit representations of the type and causes of 'problems'.	A term used by Foucault to describe practices that set some (marginalised) groups against other (mainstream) groups, and/or that establish divisions or tensions within political subjects. Attention to dividing practices propound insights into how the governmental targeting of socially marginalised behaviours assist in regulating the wider population.

3.5.4 Commencing the analysis

The WPR approach is based on three key proposals:

1. We are governed through problematisations.
2. We need to study problematisations (through analysing the problem representations they contain) rather than 'problems'.
3. We need to problematise (interrogate) the problematisations on offer through scrutinising the premises and effects of the problem representations they contain.

(Bacchi, 2009, p. xxi)

These three proposals became my 'go-to' each time I took a wrong turn during the analysis process, particularly when I slipped back into a long-standing habit of trying to identify the intentions of policymakers.

Initially, I became familiar with the selected documents (the government-appointed Picot Taskforce's 1988 ancillary report, *Administering for excellence: Effective administration in education* (the Picot Report), and the government's 1988 policy response document, *Tomorrow's Schools: The reform of education administration in New Zealand*) through rigorous reading and re-reading.

In keeping with the basic tenets of the WPR approach, I then applied Bacchi's (2009) six question prompts (refer Section 3.4.1 above) as lenses to undertake two rounds of analysis. The first part of the analysis centred on determining the predominant problematisation, while the second part considered the 'problem' representations in detail. This task was conducted by working backwards from the policy proposal for change, expressly paying attention to what the implied 'problem' was functioning as a solution to.

Focusing primarily on the solutions advanced (proposals for change) in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents, I looked at how the 'problems' were presented and characterised (e.g., as inevitable truths). Concurrently, I conducted another series of close textual readings of the documents to probe evident and hidden factors so as to determine the underlying assumptions related to the 'problem' representations, the possible overlooked areas, and the potential impacts.

Table 6 sets out how I mapped the WPR model to this study. It points to the links between the study's research questions and conceptual framework, in addition to the WPR analytical tasks and prompts.

Table 6

Mapping the WPR Framework to the Study

WPR Prompt	Question	Analysis Task	Link to the Conceptual Framework
WPR Question 1	What is the 'problem' represented to be in the Tomorrow's Schools reform policy?	Work backwards. See what the policy proposes and 'read off' the implied 'problem'. Implicit/explicit. Analyse interrelated policies. Identify, describe, classify 'problems'.	'Problems' and solutions. 'Problem' representations. Policy as problematisation.
WPR Question 2	What presuppositions or assumptions underlie the representation of the 'problem'?	Analyse discourse. Describe how the 'problem' is constructed. Identify underlying conceptual logics and political rationalities. Identify key concepts, binaries, categories.	Rationalities. Expertise and technologies. Power / knowledge. Policy as discourse. Policy as governing technology. Unexamined ways of thinking. Repeated assumptions. Competing rationalities. Binaries, concepts, categories.

WPR Question 3	How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?	Think beyond national boundaries. Consider history, look at contested nature of 'problem' over time. Trace backwards through interacting decisions and developments. How does a 'problem' come to dominate or get legitimacy?	History of the present. Policy history, tracing backwards. Macro issues (e.g., neoliberalism). Policy travel. Role of expertise.
WPR Question 4	What is left unproblematic in the 'problem' representation?	Critical analysis of the limits, what is left out? (silences). Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?	Effects / implications. Silencing (an effect). Subjugated knowledge (an effect). Power / knowledge. Subjectivities.
WPR Question 5	What effects are produced by the representation of the 'problem'?	Describe weaknesses in the 'problem' representations and point to the harm, what is at stake. Assess harmful effects. What's the long-term impact? Look at dividing practices. How does the attribution of responsibility for the 'problem' affect those targeted and the perceptions of the rest of the community about who is to 'blame'?	Dividing practices (who is made responsible). Policy as discourse. Policy as reforming. Discursive effects (what is possible to think/say). Subjectification effects. Lived effects (material).
WPR Question 6	How/where has the representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated, and defended?	How do 'problem' representations reach their target audience? Spread of the 'problem' and its authorisation, who sustains it?	Re-problematisation. Contestation. Challenging.

3.6 Challenges of the WPR approach

As 'problem' representations are generally entrenched in multiple layers of meaning, Bacchi (2009) acknowledges the WPR questions need to be applied more than once in a study. I encountered a rabbit warren of analysis during the document examination stage. This experience has been described by others using the WPR approach (e.g., Cort, 2011; Goodwin, 2011) as being similar to opening a Russian babushka doll; there is not one problematisation, but many, and each leads to another in a seemingly "never-ending spiral" (Cort, 2011, p. 24). In line with Garrity (2013), I found running repeated applications of the six WPR questions, at different stages of the study, tested my decision-making on where to establish boundaries and how to present a fine-grained analysis in my reporting, while working with a myriad of data. This was a demanding, time-consuming, and repetitive exercise.

The limited guidance available on how to report the outcomes of a WPR analysis was another challenge. Initially, I wrestled with how to structure my study, before finally settling on working through the six questions sequentially. This decision was taken notwithstanding guidance documented by other researchers (e.g., Kriznik, 2015; Lindell, 2019; McMahon, 2018) on using the questions as part of an integrated study (i.e., with specific WPR questions employed as and when deemed most applicable to the research). Noting overlapping and duplication issues, Bacchi (2009) counsels that the WPR framework can be applied and modified to suit the research being undertaken. In accordance with my experience, I found that applying the questions consecutively, although labour-intensive, provided the methodological rigour to think and reflect on how the 'problem' representations had become policy truths.

Previously emphasising the simplicity of the WPR model, Bacchi (2024, p. 140) subsequently modified her guidance, stating "now I would stress its complexity". This advice reflects my experience.

3.7 Chapter summary

This chapter described the study's overall methodological approach; a Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist analysis of discourse. The use of Bacchi's (2009) analytical tool, 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR), was summarised, and an overview of the six WPR question prompts presented.

The decision to solely focus on government documents as the research data was explained as a means of centring the problematising gaze on to policy itself (that is, to disturb the policy; to call the policy's truth status into question). Identified as practical texts, the government's policy document (*Tomorrow's Schools: The reform of education administration in New Zealand*) and the government-appointed Picot Taskforce's ancillary report (*Administering for excellence: Effective administration in education*) were selected as points of entry for the WPR analysis.

Chapter 3 also outlined the study's research process (a continuous spiral of progression), along with the challenges encountered in applying the WPR model to this thesis. In the following chapter, the first WPR question (*What is the Problem Represented to be?*) is applied to the designated government texts.

CHAPTER 4:

What is the Problem Represented to be?

There are times in one's life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.
(Foucault, 1985, p. 8)

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 consists of three parts. The chapter commences with a brief section outlining the Tomorrow's Schools reforms. This information is included because, following Bacchi's (2009) guidance, meaningful analysis cannot be realised without informed knowledge of the selected texts' background.

In the main section, as part of a clarifying exercise, I apply the first WPR question, *What is the Problem Represented to be?*, to the government texts. Symbolically, WPR question one is the launching pad to the problematisations, providing a nucleus for the rest of the study's analysis.

As Bacchi (2009) contends, a policy seldom explicitly outlines the particular 'problem' to be addressed; instead, through various policy directives, the 'problem' is implied. Accordingly, I work backwards from the stated objectives of the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents to examine how the government texts suggest an understanding of what needs to change (the 'problem' to fix) and how it should be remedied (the solution). As a consequence, I adopt Bacchi's (2009) questioning approach in order to identify 'problems' that have been naturalised or taken-for-granted over time. To this end, my analysis identified three core 'problem' representations in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents. These are described in turn and illustrated with relevant excerpts from the government texts.

While this chapter is explanatory in nature, the following chapters develop a more critical analysis of the 'problem' representations through the application of the remaining WPR questions.

4.2 The Tomorrow's Schools reforms (1987-1989)

Before examining the 'problem' representations identified in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents, I first provide some background to these government texts.

During 1987-1988, the fourth Labour Government undertook reviews of three education sectors: compulsory schooling, early childhood, and tertiary. Each review was conducted by a government-appointed working group, who in turn produced a report, followed by a published government policy response. Presented in 1988, the Picot (compulsory schooling), Meade (early childhood), and Hawke (post-compulsory) working group reports constituted the basis for the New Zealand education sector reforms of 1989-1990.

The five-member Taskforce to Review Education Administration, otherwise known as the Picot Taskforce, was chaired by Brian Picot, who was not an educator, but a prominent retail businessperson who had developed Progressive Enterprises (now known as Woolworths NZ Limited). According to Butterworth and Butterworth (1998, p. 66), Prime Minister David Lange supported Picot's appointment as the taskforce's chair because he was a "businessman with a practical social conscience".

There were two academics on the taskforce providing educational expertise: Peter Ramsay (University of Waikato Associate Professor of Education) and Margaret Rosemergy (Wellington College of Education, teacher training senior lecturer). The other two taskforce members were Whetumarama Wereta (a researcher with the Department of Māori Affairs) and Colin Wise (a private sector company director). The taskforce was serviced by a secretariat that included Department of Education senior officer Maurice Gianotti, and officials from the State Services Commission (Marijke Robinson) and Treasury (Simon Smelt, economist and co-author of Treasury's 1987 Brief to the Incoming Minister on Educational Issues) (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988).

The Picot Taskforce convened for a period of approximately 12 months. Commissioned to deliver its report directly to the Ministers of Education, Finance, and State Services, the taskforce identified an excessively complex education structure characterised by overly centralised decision-making practices. This structure was not the result of strategic planning, but rather had been haphazardly adopted over time (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). The taskforce stated that any modifications to the current system would not result in the scale of change being sought. Therefore, rather than restructuring existing institutions and systems, such as the 10 regional

education boards, the taskforce advocated for their elimination, effectively removing a layer of administration (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988).

Published in April 1988, the Picot Taskforce's report, titled *Administering for excellence: Effective administration in education,* was made public on 10 May 1988. Keeping the timeframe short (eight weeks), the government undertook an information and consultation exercise, with 20,000 submissions received (largely from professional interest groups and not the general public) (Openshaw, 2009). An inter-departmental officials' committee (including taskforce secretariat members Robinson and Smelt) was established to analyse the submissions and to write a policy document. Although Nash (1989, p. 123) questioned if the submissions were comprehensively analysed, he concluded that there was limited opposition to the proposed reforms; observing that "the majority of people are in favour of the changes as they understand them".

On 7 August 1988, three months after the release of the Picot Report, the government's official 42-page response policy document (*Tomorrow's Schools: The reform of education administration in New Zealand*) was launched. While a majority of the Picot Taskforce's recommendations were included in the Tomorrow's Schools document, Nash (1989) notes there were some changes, such as the removal of the intended education policy council. It had been proposed that an autonomous, eight-member council (four senior Ministry of Education officials and four outside appointees) would evaluate, debate, and recommend policy to the Minister of Education (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). The concept was opposed by the State Services Commission and Treasury, who argued that the line of responsibility established by the new *State Sector Act 1988* did not support policy advice from an unaccountable source (Macpherson, 1993). According to Ramsay (1993, p. 266), some of the advice that would have been put forward by the policy council "fell within the rubric of the two departments [State Services Commission and Treasury] most opposed to the council".

The former chief executive of the Ministry of Forestry, Dr Russ Ballard, was appointed to the role of Director-General, Department of Education, as a management specialist and change facilitator (with no prior experience in education administration) (Perris, 1998). The Prime Minister ensured there was no vacillating in the government's commitment to Tomorrow's Schools, thereby guaranteeing the new Director-General had the required latitude to implement the reforms within a 14-month timeframe, with a 1 October 1989 deadline (McQueen, 1991). An implementation unit within the Department of Education used short-term working groups to operationalise the Tomorrow's Schools policy document, alongside an extensive advertising campaign to promote the school governance and administration reforms.

The 1989 Education Act gave legislative effect to the Tomorrow's Schools policy. At midnight on 30 September 1989, the Department of Education and the 10 regional education boards ceased operations; and the Ministry of Education and a range of regulatory agencies (including the Review and Audit Agency, later renamed the Education Review Office) came into legal existence (Openshaw, 2009).

On 1 October 1989, more than 2,600 school boards (with over 17,000 elected trustees) gained statutory powers under the newly enacted *Education Act 1989* (Wylie, 2012). All state and state-integrated primary, intermediate, secondary, and area schools had the same administering body (a board of elected trustees, predominantly comprised of parents). The school board had the overall responsibility for the vision, finances, property, staffing, and broad values of the institution, with its governance and management related policies implemented by the principal, who, as the school's chief executive, was responsible for day-to-day management (Minister of Education, 1988).

4.3 Identifying 'problem' representations in the government texts

Foucault (1997) maintains that an efficient method for uncovering the grounding premises (the thinking) within policies is to focus on how a policy problematises an issue. Specifically, as Bacchi (2009) explains, since every policy recommends some form of change, every policy therefore comprises an implicit representation of what is considered to be problematic (the 'problem' representation). Asking 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' thereby opens up this thinking to examination.

Following Bacchi's (2009) directive to first consider the proposed solution and then work backwards to determine how the 'problem' is formed, I examined the introductory sections of the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents; noting the stated purpose of the reform process, the recommendations made, and the relationship between the proposals for change and the overall scope of the Picot Taskforce's terms of reference. Proceeding from my coding work, I also considered the influence of various themes such as governance, partnership, community, equity, choice, and value for money.

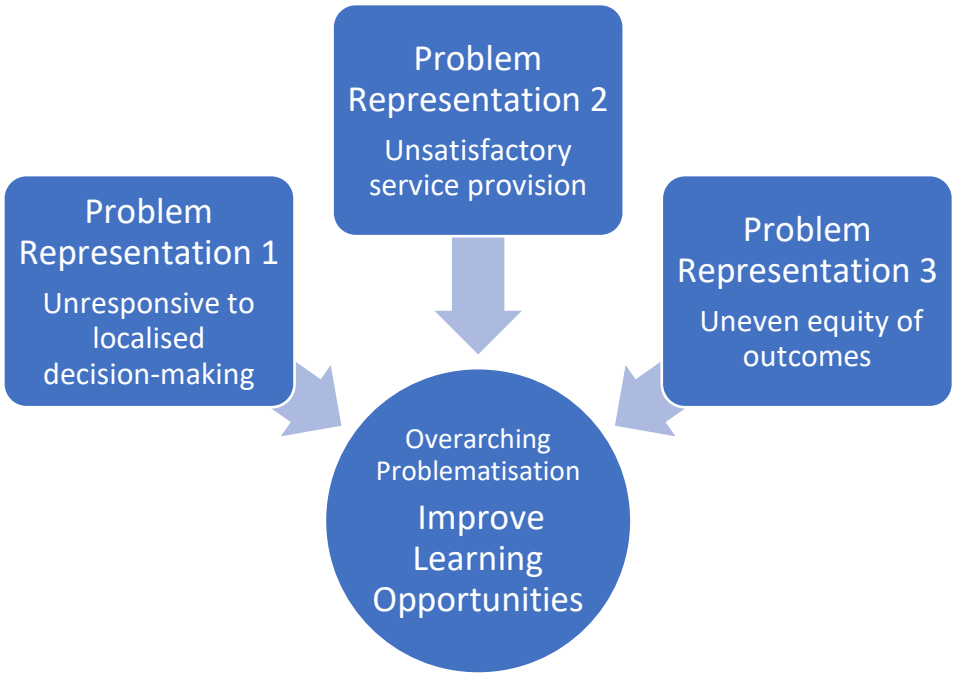
In presenting the rationale for the reform programme, the Picot Report states:

> Our investigations convinced us that the present administrative structure is overcentralised and made overly complex by having too many decision points. Effective management practices are lacking and the information needed by people in all parts of the system to make informed choices is seldom available. The result is that almost everyone feels powerless to change things they see need changing. To make progress, radical change is now required.
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. xi)

As illustrated in Figure 4, moving iteratively between the official discourse within the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents, the themes categorised during the coding exercise, and the WPR questions, I identified three central 'problem' representations.

Figure 4

Tomorrow's Schools: 'Problem' Representations



Overarching Problematisation: Improve learning and overall higher performance of schools. The purpose of the education reforms are outlined as being solely administrative, therefore implying that the primary focus is not student achievement, but how the schooling system manages itself. However, it is considered that, as a consequence of the reforms, better outcomes for students will result (e.g.,

"the Government is certain that the reform it proposes … will lead to improved learning opportunities for the children of this country") (Minister of Education, 1988, p. iv).

Problem Representation 1: An unresponsive and ineffective education system that prevents localised decision-making. A parent-school partnership is presented as a form of coordination that clusters together the community and the school for the purpose of producing better educational opportunities. Emphasising the importance of parents partnering with schools suggests that the school system's deficiencies can be resolved by mobilising the appropriate participation of parents.

Problem Representation 2: Inefficient government bureaucracy resulting in unsatisfactory service provision. Themes such as a lack of accountability, rule-bound procedures, and decreased efficiency connect to parental dissatisfaction, disaffection, and powerlessness. Working backwards from the assumption that autonomous schools are market-based solutions generating efficiency and innovation implies the state, as the traditional provider of educational resources, is inefficient.

Problem Representation 3: Uneven equity of outcomes. The focus is on individual choice, parental responsibility for education, efficiency, and competition. The principle of equality, in the sense of equal outcomes, is replaced by the principle of equity, in the sense of opportunities. It is expected that a schooling system based on choice will foster diversity. This diversity extends across ethnicity and inequality, as parents, irrespective of their economic, social, or cultural capital, are equally free to select the school of their choice.

My analysis is one reading of the problematisations in the government texts. For example, if I approached the study considering the 'problem' of teachers, this would provide a different set of problematisations. Consequently, it is the three 'problem' representations identified above that emerge in the analysis as discursively central, relative to the parent-school connection. These key tenets are consistently repeated in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents; that is, the policy objectives are uniformly described in relation to these three 'problems'.

4.4 'Problem' Representation 1: An inflexible and ineffective education system that prevents localised decision-making

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On the page welcoming readers to the Tomorrow's Schools policy document, under the heading "The education of our children: Your chance to be involved", a personal message from Prime

Minister/Minister of Education David Lange includes the statement, "… our children will not receive the education to which they are entitled unless our administration of education is effective" (Minister of Education, 1988, p. iii). The preamble provides the impetus for the policy and establishes the 'problem' being addressed, specifically that the education system is "inflexible and unresponsive to consumer demand", with unnecessary layers of bureaucracy preventing localised decision-making (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 35).

The parent-school partnership model, through boards of trustees and self-managing schools, is the solution determined the most appropriate for improving organisational flexibility and efficiency (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). In conjunction with parents as core members (and electors) of school boards, Tomorrow's Schools confirms the establishment of a national, independent Parent Advocacy Council to promote the interests of parents at all levels of education, and Community Education Forums to support debate within the wider school community (Minister of Education, 1988).

The empowerment of parents, particularly through their involvement on boards of trustees, marks a specific shift from the traditional dependence on intermediary (district education boards) or central (Department of Education) levels of bureaucracy. Boston et al. (1996) note that, in the case of the New Zealand schooling reforms, rather than using the term devolution, it is more appropriate to describe the relocation of authority from the government to the community as decentralisation (i.e., delegating authority to lower levels, with final responsibility staying at the national level).

Key to the policy of transferring authority from the national to the local level is the idea that individuals and/or communities know their own interests best. This suggests that boards of trustees, at least in theory, should identify with and respond to the educational requirements of parents and their communities.

The task of determining the 'problem' representations in a policy is not necessarily straightforward, as policies often contain multiple representations that may overlap or are embedded ('nested'), one within the other (Bacchi, 2009). Accordingly, there is a need to check if key terms or topics within problematisations also require scrutiny. As detailed in the following section, two associated issues were identified nesting in the first 'problem' representation, providing a sense of ambiguity to the conception of the Tomorrow's Schools education reform policy.

4.4.1 A problematic diversity of interpretations

In the government texts, developing a connection between the school and the community is a key commitment, which, it is claimed, will result in more parental and community involvement, contributing to localised decision-making (Minister of Education, 1988). While the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents emphasise communication and consultation with the local community, they do not clarify what is meant by the term community.

This is important because community means different things to different people. For example, a community may refer to a body of people who share something in common, or a group living in the same proximity. When the term is applied to schools, it can be used to mean the parents of students, it can denote the neighbourhood community of which the school is a part, it may refer to the members of smaller groups of parents and other interested people who are actively involved in the work of the school, or it may describe groups of people who have shared interests and attitudes relating to education and the school. Harold (1992, p. 4) notes, for instance, that the school community concept has several dimensions, including the identification of a philosophical boundary ("anyone who believes in the kaupapa (purpose) of our school is seen as part of the community").

In the Picot Report, there are multiple examples of where the word community is used. For example, "the particular needs of the community" (p. 44), "community educational needs" (p. 52), "wishes of their community" (p. 52), "communities said they believed" (p. 55), "a broad-based community view" (p. 55) (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). The Picot Report's common usage of the term community indicates a quintessential collection of small, unified communities, which suggests a commonality of interests and a sense of collective purpose. I argue this assumes that power is equally distributed within a community and that the community's shared interests will, given the opportunity, result in it coming together and expressing comparable views. In reality, it is difficult to reconcile this assumption.

The repetitive use of the word community suggests that improved engagement or participation frames the 'problem' and its solution in a specific way (i.e., when schools engage with their local communities, students will learn more, have more opportunities, and have better outcomes). This provides a starting point for understanding how the 'problem' is represented, and how and why more engagement with communities is important. For example, the government texts iterate the taken-for-granted assumption that more community engagement will "encourage commitment, initiative, energy, and enthusiasm, and that these will inevitably lead to improved performance" … "and the standard of

education outcomes will be improved under the new structure" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 98).

Recognising that defining community (or more accurately, communities) is difficult, Ife (1995) submits that the contested term community is one that is given a multitude of meanings, contingent on when, where, why, and by whom it is being employed. This point was originally made by Hilary (1955, cited in Bess et al., 2002), who identified over 94 different definitions of community. As Dudgeon et al. (2002, p. 253) note, "it is important … to pay very close attention to the way the signifier 'community' is used both to unite and embrace, and to differentiate and exclude". A broader argument can be made that community is a fluid term favoured by government as it provides a simple way of dismissing personas that manifest power and socio-economic differences. This accordingly makes it possible to discuss the business community in the same manner as the local community (i.e., as if they are the same).

The platitudinous, taken-for-granted term community involvement is an example of what Bacchi (2000, p. 45) calls "category politics". Understanding how this term is used in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents augments how community involvement is both constructed through the discourses in the government texts, along with how other meanings, including how indigenous communities might use the term, are constrained or concealed in the documents. Also of significance is the contrast between the self-identification of communities compared with academic or political characterisations.

4.4.2 A partnership between the professionals and the community

A key feature of the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents is partnership. Partnership is, at one level, primarily outlined in the government texts as a contractual agreement (similar to a service agreement) about who does what in the process of administering the school to improve provision. At another level, partnership is described as a meeting of equal parties, who share information and viewpoints and reach decisions together. The perception presented in the latter description implies that when barriers between parents and schools are overcome, partnerships provide a solution to school problems.

Terms such as partnership, community, and citizenship all have positive inferences. For instance, partnership is a broad notion denoting a wide range of ideas encompassing equality, consensus, harmony, and working together. Community is a term routinely used to provide an affirmative feeling

to the other concepts it is linked to (e.g., community care, community spirit), while citizenship implies a secure and positive partnership between the individual and the state. Describing such words as 'condensation symbols', Edelman (1985) details how these terms consolidate emotions; their usage accordingly evoking particular sentiments. Over time, the terms, although vague and lacking specificity, acquire assumed meanings that are seldom examined (Edelman, 1985).

In the introduction to the Tomorrow's Schools document, the Minister of Education (1988) explains that the intent is to move parents and schools into a new phase centred on working collaboratively together through a partnership, where parents, through their formal board of trustees' governance role, are assigned monitoring and accountability tasks. This personifies what Ball (2003) terms performativity in partnership, with schools and boards working to meet accountability requirements, without necessarily producing substantive changes in practice.

The expansive use of the word partnership in the government texts suggests that it is widely accepted as unproblematic, which correlates with Burgos' (2003, p. 55) view that the term represents a "floating and empty signifier", with its ambiguity being "politically productive". This notion discloses a tension between the rhetoric of proposed collaboration and instances of increasing central control within the education system. For example, in Tomorrow's Schools, a partnership between the professionals and the particular community in which the school is located is promulgated, but is simultaneously prevaricated in the statement that this will occur "within the overall national guidelines [for education] set by the State" (Minister of Education, 1988, p. 1). Notably, this point introduces issues concerning the way in which power within such partnerships is shaped, structured, and ordered by the state, along with consideration of the dissimilar characteristics, objectives, and resources of the partners seeking to define a shared aim.

A fundamental idea supporting the promotion of partnership is the notion of collaboration. In theoretical terms, collaboration and other related models, such as joint working, cooperation, and working together, are central to defining the concept of partnership (Crozier & Reay, 2005; Cunningham & Davis, 1985; Lyon, 2018). In this regard, the Picot Report lists four evaluative criteria for assessing the new schooling structure. Criterion two advances a collaborative participatory process so that parents and community groups are able to "… understand the structure of the system, to participate in decision-making, and to influence the system so that it provides the best educational opportunities for them" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 6). This implies that parents and the community will be afforded an appropriate voice, and that processes are accountable, transparent, open, and fair.

However, this precept does not suggest that parents influence decision-making; instead, it reflects the "centralising / decentralising tension" (Lingard, 1996, p. 73) associated with a corporate managerialist ideology that promotes participation at the local level and, at the same time, the control of decision-making by a centralised government department. In the government texts, the oft-repeated mantra of bringing together schools and communities to facilitate the development of a deeper partnership is, in essence, an example of what Ball (2021, p. 12) refers to as an "enlightenment concept", focusing on a utopian idea of "moving from the inadequacies of the present to some future state of perfection", where everything works out okay. While partnerships construct an image of participation that benefits everyone, Cardini (2006) reminds that in practice some partners benefit more than others.

While the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents emphasise the parent-school partnership concept, where equal power is suggested, the notion needs to be contextualised in terms of dominant political and economic factors. For example, Crozier (1998) argues that in an era of neoliberalism:

> 'Partnership', like 'citizenship' is … an essential part of marketization. Whilst the market fragments and promotes individualism, 'partnership' and 'citizenship' encourage involvement, commitment, and responsibility. It is, however, an involvement, commitment, and responsibility based on individual vested interest, indeed a necessary prerequisite to protect one's 'investment'. Thus, in harnessing this, control upon the individual is exerted. (p. 125)

4.5 'Problem' Representation 2: Inefficient government bureaucracy resulting in unsatisfactory service provision

In its review of the schooling system, the Picot Report records that the administrative structure of education is too centralised, hierarchical, wasteful, and inflexible (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). The Picot Report narrative foregrounds this need for correction, stating:

> There is an overly high degree of centralisation in our education system. … Very few decisions are made at local level; when they are, they are heavily influenced by rules and procedures determined centrally … the information needed by people in all parts of the system to make informed choices is seldom available.
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, pp. 22–23)

Consequently, integral to the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents is the unconditional acceptance of a broken schooling system, presented as deficient and requiring remediation. This deficiency is expressed through warnings such as "tinkering with the system will not be sufficient to achieve the improvements now required … in our view the time has come for quite radical change" and "this kind of clustering of failure is certain to lead to personal, social, and economic catastrophe … it cannot be allowed to continue" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 36).

In response, the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents advocate that the government step back from the explicit provision of education itself and focus on providing the autonomy for individual institutions to meet the educational objectives of their communities. To this end, the documents represent education as a marketable commodity (i.e., "providing a wider range of options both for consumers and for learning institutions"), which, if opened to competition, will improve the quality of the 'product' (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 4). Subsequently, the advancement of market forces and competition by empowering parents through choice, and fostering individual and organisational autonomy, is the solution promoted in the government texts to address inefficiencies in the education system.

4.6 'Problem' Representation 3: Uneven equity of outcomes

The structure established by the Tomorrow's Schools reforms is not exclusively a market, a state bureaucracy, nor an authentic parent-school partnership. Rather, it is an uneasy combination of each of these components. This point is acknowledged by Gordon (1992):

> Whilst the Labour Government's policies allowed for the structure of a market model of education to be set up in schools, its contradictory but strongly held commitment to equity in education mitigated against the full realisation of a market approach. The dual goals of equity and efficiency, which in essence meant monetarist [neoliberal] structures and Keynesian practices, in fact provided a barrier to either approach being fully achieved, and essentially devolved downwards to individual schools the problem of a contradictory system. (p. 199)

In the Picot Report, the case for the equitable or social democratic provision of education is expressed in the following way:

> Our view is that the objectives of the system must determine the organisational structure, and so we have identified two fundamental objectives for the education system as a whole and then attempted to design a structure to achieve them. These objectives are:
>
> - Every learner should gain the maximum individual and social benefit from the money spent on education.
> - Education should be fair and just for every learner regardless of their gender, and of their social, cultural, or geographic circumstances.
>
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 3)

While the concept of equity to improve the relative position of disadvantaged groups is raised in the Picot Report, it is extended and outlined more comprehensively within Section 3.1 of the Tomorrow's Schools policy document. The increased emphasis on equity measures in Tomorrow's Schools is attributable, in part, to a combined submission to the Picot Taskforce, which was collated by staff working within Māori education following nationwide hui involving over 7,000 attendees (Openshaw, 2011). Expressing basic support for the taskforce's findings, the submission nonetheless records concern that "the status of the tangata whenua, the Treaty of Waitangi, and a Māori presence is absent in the Picot structure" (Openshaw, 2011, p. 68).

The Tomorrow's Schools document subsequently prescribes that the equity objectives of the new education system are to underpin all policy. This is recorded in the Tomorrow's Schools policy document, which articulates that the new education administration system will promote and progressively achieve equity for women, Māori, Pasifika, and other ethnic groups, with progress towards equity goals monitored. Notably, the document states unequivocally that equity issues are to be integrated into all phases of the reform process, rather than being "treated as an optional extra" (Minister of Education, 1988, p. 25).

In the Picot Report, choice is advanced as the first of the taskforce's four core values. The Report notes that choice "will involve providing a wider range of options, both for consumers and for learning institutions". Moreover, it is considered "the creation of more choice in the system [will] ensure greater efficiency and equity" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 4).

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2012a) affirms that equity does not mean providing the same resources to students, nor students having the same outcomes. Prior to

the 1989 Tomorrow's Schools reforms, equity in education was predicated on the principles of fairness and inclusion, whereby personal and/or social factors, such as ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and/or geographical location, do not function as barriers to a student's educational potential and achievement. This theme is exemplified in the Fraser-Beeby 1939 educational statement:

> The Government's objective, broadly expressed, is that every person, whatever his level of academic ability, whether he be rich or poor, whether he live in town or country, has a right as a citizen, to a free education of the kind for which he is best fitted and to the fullest extent of his powers.
> (Fraser, 1939, cited in the Currie Report, Commission on Education in New Zealand, 1962, p. 11)

In this sense, equity suggests an approach to education that seeks to improve the lives of individuals and their community, with an emphasis on meeting the educational needs of all students. From this standpoint, equity is conceptualised as implying principles of fairness (or justice) in terms of access to the benefits of education.

In contrast, neoliberalism associates equity to the equal availability of resources, where everyone, in theory, benefits depending on their personal efforts. In this context, equity is viewed as the availability of an equal right and opportunity for individuals to engage in the processes of self-growth, with attention directed to choice being equally available to all. Held (2006, p. 201) maintains that self-focused effort signifies that "the collective good [can] be realised properly in most cases only by private individuals acting in competitive isolation and pursuing their sectoral aims with minimal state interference".

Accordingly, in a neoliberal approach, equality is based on the equal availability of options (freedom of choice), through the (self-focused) actions of the individual responsible for their choice in a free and competitive market. Alternative notions of equality as equity, which are focused on the individual's opportunity and ability to access these options, are no longer possible as they may rely on government intervention and support (for example, through the provision of welfare).

The Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents advocate that the localisation of decision making to individual institutions will allow schools to better address equity issues in their area. Similarly, the government texts consider that the inclusion of parents and the community in school decision-making processes will ensure that parents' values and interests are heard and respected. Therefore, markets are conceptualised as addressing equity by responding to local demands.

4.7 Chapter summary

In the first section of Chapter 4, background information was presented outlining the fourth Labour Government's education reforms, which resulted in the policy document, Tomorrow's Schools. This segment was followed by the application of WPR question one, '*What is the Problem Represented to be?*'.

Considering the proposed solution and then working backwards to determine how the 'problem' was formed, three 'problem' representations were identified in the government texts: (1) an inflexible and ineffective education system that prevents localised decision-making; (2) inefficient government bureaucracy resulting in unsatisfactory service provision; (3) uneven equity of outcomes. Each of these problematisations were then described and illustrated with relevant passages from the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents.

In the next chapter, the second WPR question is employed to establish the underlying assumptions and frameworks of thought that shape the 'problem' representations.

CHAPTER 5:

The underlying assumptions and rationalities

Since these things have been made, they can be unmade,
as long as we know how it was that they were made.
(Foucault, 1988a, p. 37)

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 begins the analysis of the problematisations identified in the previous chapter. The goal of WPR question two (*What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?)* is centred on determining what meanings need to be in place for a particular 'problem' representation to make sense. Consequently, what I am asking in this chapter is not why something occurs, but how it is possible for it to occur. Bacchi (2009) equates this question to a process of Foucauldian archaeology, where the intent is to unearth the deeper meaning of texts.

To achieve this, the chapter centres on the conceptual logics (knowledge framework) and values that underpin the three 'problem' representations specified in Chapter 4, along with the concepts and categories on which they rely. Therefore, to understand the origins of the problematisations and why they are shaped in the manner that they are, I employ Foucault's (1994a) notion of knowledge archaeology to uncover assumptions, unexamined ways of thinking, and taken-for-granted knowledges/discourses.

Importantly, Bacchi (2009) reminds that questioning what is assumed in a 'problem' representation is neither about drawing out the beliefs held by the policymaker, nor is it about identifying their biases. Instead, the objective is to identify the assumptions that "*lodge within* the problematisations" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 5, emphasis in original). In this regard, the second WPR question directs attention to the binaries, key concepts, and categories that have been used to construct the 'problem' and give it meaning within the policy.

5.2 Assumptions about parents as consumers and governors

Within the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents, two contrasting objectives are advanced: one centring on the furtherance of self-interest and the other focusing on community participation. Both objectives consider that parents play a role in educational outcomes. The two goals are linked to the same governmental rationale that seeks to develop empowered and self-responsible citizens who have greater power over their local circumstances and more input into educational decision-making.

At their core, the government texts demonstrate a neoliberal governing strategy that supports minimal government regulation, the distribution of services through the market, and the transferring of responsibilities from a national centre to local agencies and communities. Operating with relative autonomy from central government, the aim of this form of governing includes a considerable measure of individual choice, increased local decision-making responsibility, and organisational autonomy (Lorenzini, 2018).

In describing the complex nature of the existing administrative structure for the education system, the Picot Report notes that:

> In such an environment there is an erosion of confidence and an undermining of the likelihood of effective co-operation between institutions and consumers. It reinforces the need for central direction by failing to build on the ability of people to look even-handedly at the options available to them and to make decisions for themselves. The lack of information places great importance on administrative rules and instructions and reinforces the culture of dependence … this culture of dependence will be changed only with difficulty, but changed it must be.
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 28)

The proposals for change in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents manifest notions of education as a commodity in a marketplace, with schools competing to deliver services to students and parents (as consumers), who, it is presumed, will 'shop around' for the 'best buys'. Governing technologies contribute to this construction of parents as consumers, placing them in active-inactive and supportive-unsupportive binaries within the schooling system.

In positioning parents as consumers of education, who use improved information to "check on those with power and responsibility within the system", while holding rights of choice, the Picot Report signposts that the rationale for choice is based on a market model of education, whereby parents exercise their independence and make decisions about what services to engage with (Taskforce to

Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 43). This premise rests, to a large extent, upon assumptions concerning the role and responsibilities of parents in producing 'literate' citizens. The parent as consumer is accordingly prompted to make the 'right' choices so that they can play their part in "ensuring that learners receive the best possible education available from every dollar spent" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. vii).

The documents affirm that choice can be exerted in several ways. For example, communities may exercise choice in electing parent representatives to boards of trustees, while boards may utilise choice in allocating the funding they receive from the Ministry of Education. The government texts also advocate that parents, as autonomous and empowered citizens, can make individualised choices from the range of educational services available, enabling them to carry out their duties and responsibilities as 'active citizens' and 'choosing subjects' (Minister of Education, 1988).

Accordingly, the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents incorporate the concept of transferring responsibility (from the Department of Education to local communities) and establishing ostensibly autonomous decision-making bodies (school boards of trustees). The board of trustees model presented in the documents parallels a commercial enterprise, held accountable through its board of directors to its stakeholders, within an education market environment. This paradigm is based on the limited role of the state and a contractual and managerial relationship between service funders and service providers (i.e., schools with greater managerial independence determine how they deliver the products or services (the outputs) being funded by the government). Consequently, the approach to neoliberal rationalities is based on the operative metaphor of education as a market; as a framework logic to which all other logics are attached. There is an implicit assumption, developing from the market model of schooling, that the concept of a 'good' parent aligns with the notion of a 'good' customer.

Correspondingly, the parent as governor (board of trustee member) has designated roles (e.g., employer of school staff, representative of the parent community). In the Tomorrow's Schools reframing of the relationship between parents and schools, a Parent Advocacy Council (to represent and promote the interests of parents within the education system) and Community Education Forums (to give voice to the wider school community) were established. These two groups were subsequently abolished (for cost saving purposes), resulting in boards of trustees being left as the formal mechanism of community participation. A grounding assumption within the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents is that boards of trustees are about community involvement in education. Results from a study by Voisey and Asquith (2021) show that board functions are specific, with time-consuming statutory monitoring and accountability obligations to adhere to, along with decision-making in areas such as financial and resource management, thereby limiting community engagement.

Instead of debating and advocating for the interests of parents, students, and their communities, with input into educational decision-making around substantive issues (e.g., the purpose of education, alternative visions of schooling), board members are inversely drawn into the power-knowledge network of performativity (performance against targets), managerialism, corporate oversight, and prescribed accountability (Voisey & Asquith, 2021; Wylie, 2007, 2009). The voicing of community concerns into the national education system is therefore constrained. Smyth et al. (2014, p. 70) synopsises this point in their observation that "community engagement is viewed through a lens that is sharply focused on the agenda of the school or the education system, rather than the local community". By limiting the mechanisms through which communication can occur, local voice is circumscribed in the government decision-making process and the overall development of educational ideas and practices.

5.3 Assumptions about the market model

Choice relies on generic neoliberal assumptions about the relationship between individuals, the state, and the market (e.g., public choice theory). That is to say, all individuals are 'rational maximisers' of their own self-interest in the economic marketplace; each individual is logical in their decision-making, largely self-interested, and always seeking to maximise their own benefits (Schedler & Proeller, 2010). A basic principle of public choice theory is that for an institution to be both efficient and responsive to consumer demand, there must be the constant pressure of competition from other providers, together with concurrent capacity for consumers to exercise market choice (Codd, 1999).

In the Picot Report, four central values are identified as imperative for the new education administrative structure. The first core value is 'choice'. The Picot Report states:

> Choice will involve providing a wider range of options, both for consumers and for learning institutions. We detected widespread concern that the delivery of education is failing in significant ways, and we see the creation of more choice in the system as a way of ensuring greater efficiency and equity. Consumers need to be able to directly influence their learning institution by having a say in the running of it, or by being able to turn to acceptable alternatives. Only if people are free to choose can a true co-operative partnership develop between the community and learning institutions.
>
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 4)

Noteworthy, as the first statement of the Picot Taskforce's vision, this excerpt introduces the neoliberal elements of choice and consumer, together with terms such as 'efficiency', 'equity', and 'free to choose'. The paragraph begins with the assertion that choice will provide expanded options. The second sentence presents the rationale for that statement, noting that 'education is failing'. Correspondingly, through the declaration of 'widespread concern', validation for the recommended reforms is provided. The third sentence is consistent with the neoliberal prescriptions advocated by the New Zealand Treasury (1987b) (i.e., the government has an obligation to ensure choice is available to the consumers of education). In the paragraph's last sentence, the phrase 'only if people are free to choose' creates an assumption of individual freedom and empowerment (from the government).

Ranson's (2003) findings are particularly relevant here, highlighting that choice operates within the presupposition that markets, and the purported empowerment associated with the selection of schools by parents, places accountability on both schools and the overall education system (via the system's indirect control over schooling). In the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents, a parent-school binary is signified by an accountability relationship. Parents as consumers hold schools to account for their child's educational progress through the activation of choice within the market, while individual schools provide market indicators concerning the quality and value of their school (e.g., through school performance data such as exam results, Education Review Office audit and accountability reporting). According to Treasury (1987b, p. 150), the market pressure of parental choice can be understood to exert a motivating discipline that may "improve the average quality of schooling".

Schools consequently have an interest in promoting themselves, resulting in parents being able to access relevant information on which to make informed decisions. A connection between information provision and school choice is emphasised in the Picot Report:

> For consumers, good information flows provide a way of checking on the exercise of power and responsibility within the system, and provide a basis for choice. So, funding formulae, grant calculations, national objectives, and reports on performance should be publicly available, debatable, and subject to scrutiny.
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 43)

The market model asserts that by exercising choice, parents produce indicators for schools (for example, parents who withdraw their child send a signal to the school to improve service delivery). Once a school is regarded as unpopular, implicitly on the basis of parents judging its service provision to be below standard, students are transferred from the school and enrolments decline. This creates an imperative for the school to correct any shortcomings and improve educational outcomes, so as to

reverse its decline. As a consequence, this premise provides schools with an incentive to pay attention to the needs and/or demands of the consumer. Similarly, within this model, it is expected that schools recognised by parents to be performing well will attract more students and thrive.

By way of illustration, my children's school, Petone College, was involved in a cycle of decline as it was unable to strengthen its market position. While Hutt Valley High School overflowed with nearly 2,000 students on a site designed for far fewer, neighbouring Petone College's enrolments dropped from 900 in the late 1980s to 230 students in 1998. Despite the board's appointment of a principal who introduced market tenets to raise standards, the employment of new staff (34 teachers over four years), and a move to business sponsorship schemes (business partnerships with companies such as Dulux Paints and Pak 'n' Save), the school roll continued to fall. Unable to overcome the 'cycle of flight' from a perceived failing school, Petone College closed in 1998.

Emanating from public choice theory, there is an underlying assumption in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents that all parents enter the market equally free to choose. While the parental choice paradigm is extolled as the actuation of market forces within education, whereby consumers generate excellence and accountability through their decisions about what services to engage in, the choice available to parents can be considered a misnomer, or at a minimum, a mischaracterisation, as it provides a false impression of parental power. Lauder (2020) substantiates this point, noting that not all parents have equal knowledge about schools, nor the ability to send their children to the school of their choice. However, as illustrated by the government texts, the inclusion of choice, as a central prerogative within educational reform, acts as a powerful motivator, manifesting as a form of Foucauldian productive power (i.e., systems of power whereby educational discourses are produced and maintained as truth) (Foucault, 2003).

5.4 Assumptions about the contractual relationship

To achieve effective administration in education, the Picot Report advocates a system based on a contract between customers and providers (a school charter), along with a separate agency for audit and accountability purposes (the Education Review Office). The government texts view the charter of each school as the organisational "lynchpin", which acts as "a contract between the community and the institution, and the institution and the state" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. xi). The charter is, in effect, an operational constitution that will:

> … include not only the overall objectives of the institution, but also the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to be learned in the institution, and the standards to be achieved within the national objectives. Both parents and teachers have a major part to play in determining these. (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 46)

The Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents embody the assumption that a clearly defined contract between a 'principal' and an 'agent' (agency theory) will ensure compliance with institutional objectives. Specifically, through the school charter, the board of trustees is an agent of the government, at the same time as the school principal is an agent of the board. In this premise, as outlined in the Picot Report, the government's definitive power and control is retained. In effect, the government does not take a hands-off approach, instead it moves from an interventionist position of micro-managing to one that requires the school to manage itself while remaining directly accountable to the government through national objectives (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988).

This point is communicated by Lange (1994):

> Tomorrow's Schools accepted that local management was desirable. But the local school could flourish only if it based its programmes on national standards. I used, when promoting the reforms, to tell people that they could be as democratic as they liked, once they acknowledged the Government's authority to determine the curriculum and the standards of the teaching profession, and its right to examine the performance of the school in the interests of the children. (p. 88)

In the government texts, the school charter is defined as a key component in the restructuring of school administration and the education system. However, the board of trustee's responsibility for the implementation of centrally-determined policies, coupled with the evaluation requirements of the government-funded Education Review Office, reveal the charter's representation of the school community's aspirations and priorities, and the board of trustees' potential for autonomous action, is constrained.

In describing the purpose of the mandatory clauses in the school charter, Deputy Prime Minister Palmer (1988, p. 5) affirms that "the centre must set national objectives … the key to the Picot proposals is the charter which binds those who are responsible for each institution and which marries the community goals of that particular institution with the national goals". This statement highlights that the charter's non-discretionary elements (e.g., legal obligations under the National Education Goals and the New Zealand Curriculum Framework) provide a clear set of government goals, thereby enabling the state to limit the capacity for local expression.

Lange's (1999) observation of how education was shaped by political processes during the 1980s affords a useful frame of reference for the advent of the school charter. For example, in 1989, to prevent the possibility of litigation and to protect the state's centrally determined policies, the standing of the school charter was changed by government from a contract to an agreement. The charter's status was further modified in 1990 when the agreement became an undertaking through which boards of trustees would commit to meeting the mandatory requirements of the Ministry of Education-determined National Administration Guidelines, the New Zealand Curriculum Framework, and wider state rhetoric (i.e., schools must undertake to achieve what is set out in their charter; the state retains the power to ensure achievement is realised) (Snook et al., 1999).

The consequence of these alterations to the school charter structure was a relocation of the relationship from one of community power to one of the state as principal and the community as agent. Accordingly, the government moved from a model of devolution (the transfer of authority), to a delegation of responsibility where schools were granted operational autonomy while the government retained the ability to regulate and influence schools (Codd & Gordon, 1991).

5.5 Assumptions about equity

Based on the neoliberal assumption of individual responsibility, the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents highlight, as a principal objective, the maximisation of individual benefit from government expenditure on education. As such, the texts employ a governmental rationality that constructs individuals as primarily responsible for their lives (i.e., as active, choice-making, and autonomous citizens) (Bacchi, 2009). In parallel, a second goal emphasises that education has a role to play in addressing disadvantages that work in favour of some groups and against others (i.e., issues of equity and social justice in the provision of schooling).

As discussed in Section 5.3 above, the government texts present choice as one of the fundamental policy objectives. The rationale advanced is that education is failing, that the provision of choice will address this failure, and that making available more choice in the schooling system will ensure "greater efficiency and equity" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 4). Together these points convey the assumption that participation in education will redress inequality. This premise depends on (and is linked to) another presupposition; that of unproblematic access to quality education. Ball et al. (2002, p. 66) contend that the "capacity for choice is unevenly distributed across the social classes", and that a discourse of choice (i.e., the promotion and enhancement of consumer

opportunity and options in education) disguises the real inequalities experienced by those making such choices.

The equity goal is a salient feature of the Tomorrow's Schools policy document, specifically setting out that:

> Equity objectives will underpin all policy related to the reform of education … to ensure that a new system of education administration promotes and progressively achieves greater equity for women, Māori, Pacific Island, other groups with minority status; and for working class, rural and disabled students, teachers, and communities … to ensure that equity issues are integrated into all aspects of changes in education administration and not treated as an optional extra.
> (Minister of Education, 1988, p. 25)

The government texts juxtapose the integration of social justice themes, parental involvement, local decision-making, a fair and just education system, with the language, principles, and practices of business and the marketplace. From an ideological standpoint, neoliberalism specifically challenges the government's involvement in advocating for equity and the concept of education as a social or public good. This point is emphasised in MacLean's (2017, p. 46) assertion that "collectivist solutions to social problems" compromise individual autonomy.

The Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents signal that equity issues are about barriers to education, and the lack of inclusion and responsiveness of the education system to students' needs, especially Māori. In the Picot Report's prioritised values for the new administrative structure, core value number three is 'cultural sensitivity'. Noting an obligation not only to honour the Treaty of Waitangi, but also to extend "cultural sensitivity to all cultures in New Zealand", the Picot Report conveys a need for "reaching out, accompanied by the need to listen and change" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 4). Moreover, it chastises an education system that leads to individuals outside the cultural mainstream experiencing "personal and social dislocation" from learning (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 5).

Although the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents signify a need for equitable outcomes for disadvantaged groups, there is an underlying assumption within the documents that equity also corresponds to fair and just opportunities for individuals to pursue their own interests, free of government involvement. This point is embedded in the government texts as an emblematic neoliberal rationality directed towards the removal of constraints on autonomy, leading to individuals taking personal responsibility for improving their social and economic status. Writers on this subject (see, for example, Rawolle, 2013; Rawolle et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2016) assert that, in practice,

neoliberal-based policies reproduce and augment inequities, whilst claiming to offer fair and just opportunities and freedom of choice. The outcome this suggests is that opportunity and choice in education can be achieved only with a resultant cost to social justice.

5.6 Chapter summary

Chapter 5 uncovered the core assumptions and taken-for-granted knowledges/discourses underpinning the 'problem' representations; namely, neoliberal assumptions and aspects of social justice. In this context, the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents incorporate social justice themes (e.g., parental involvement, local decision-making, a fair and just education system) with the language, principles, and practices of business and the marketplace.

Two contrasting categories were highlighted: one centring on the furtherance of self-interest and the other focusing on community participation. The chapter underlined that the concept of education as a commodity in the market is based on premises inherent in a neoliberal framework; for example, moving responsibility into the sphere of the individual. This encompasses an underlying assumption that all parents enter the education marketplace equally free to choose, regardless of their economic and social positions.

Transitioning from revealing the assumptions underpinning the way the problematisations are thought about, through the use of Foucauldian archaeology; the next chapter moves to map the developments and decisions that advanced the 'problem' representations under study, via a Foucauldian genealogical approach.

CHAPTER 6:

Genealogy

When the past is forgotten, its power over the present is hidden from view.

(Kincheloe, 1997, p. xxxvi)

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 takes a brief detour from the analysis of the government texts to situate the 'problem' representations identified in Chapter 4 within a historical and broader socio-economic and ideological context. In this chapter, I answer Bacchi's (2009) third question, *'How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?'*. This involves using a Foucauldian genealogical approach to trace the developments and decisions that allow particular ideas to gain dominance and standing. The value of this form of inquiry is that it challenges the idea that dominant discourses and practices are "timeless, natural, [and] unquestionable" (Rose, 1999, p. 20).

Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) explain that Foucault's use of the term 'history of the present' details the process in which history becomes a means of engaging with the present. Accordingly, the point is not to think historically about the past but rather to use historical materials to rethink the present. Moreover, a history of the present encompasses the influence and discursive practices linked to the production of knowledge (i.e., the taken-for-granted truth of the present).

Two genealogical strands are examined in this chapter, one being the longer history of the parent-school partnership paradigm, and the other being the inception of neoliberal approaches to education policy. The objective is to identify specific junctures when decisions were made and directions were decided upon, leading to the emergence of new systems of thought (Bacchi, 2009).

6.2 Genealogical Strand 1: The emergence of the parent-school partnership paradigm

Foucault's method of genealogy (as described by Ball, 2012a; Lorenzini, 2020; Mills, 2003) is used in this study to examine the confluence of the parent-school relationship and policy. This first strand takes a genealogical approach to articulate the relationship between parents and schools, a 'problem' that Koopman (2013, p. 1) equates to being "submerged" … lodged deep inside of us all", which involves a form of conditioning without a full understanding of why or how.

As Bacchi (2009) explains, studying the 'problem' is in the present, but genealogy considers the past in order to understand the present, so that the possibility of doing, being, and thinking something different is visible. Accordingly, this involves starting with a 'problem' in the present and examining how that present came to be. A Foucauldian genealogical approach is interested in the subtle changes and developments that occur rather than focusing on "seismic shifts" that emphasise a primary cause for historical change (Downing, 2008, p. 15). Consequently, the core idea of genealogy is to chronicle the small and multiple changes that result in adjustments to thinking and operating in any period of time.

6.2.1 Pre-1970s: An era concerned with separation

A feature of the Tomorrow's Schools reforms is the reframing of the relationship between parents and schools, and of the activities that manifest that relationship. In New Zealand, the involvement of parents in their children's education is not a new concept. However, what has changed over time is the way in which parents are positioned within the schooling system.

Starting with the introduction of the *Education Act 1877*, which established free, compulsory, and secular state education in New Zealand, parents have effectively been positioned as bystanders, based on the notion that the classroom is exclusively the teacher's domain. In this context, the nexus of the parent-school relationship is predicated on the 'expert model', where schools assert their expertise to make educational decisions, and parents are told about practices as and when required. Swap (1993) describes this as the protective model, where schools are safeguarded from parent intrusion, and the role of the school and parent is intentionally separated.

As a means of understanding the function of school committees during the twentieth century, it is useful to examine the findings from Davey's (1977) study on women and school committees. All state

primary and area schools had committees made up of between five to nine locally elected parents, who were responsible for participating in the election of the region's education board, maintaining the school's premises, undertaking minor financial administration, and organising fundraising activities. Davey (1977, p. 24) detailed school committee members' dissatisfaction and disaffection with the education system, with committees characterised as "rubber stamps, administrative puppets, anachronisms, and a waste of time". One chairperson specified, "we are only caretakers for the Education Department, who always tell us what to do and what to spend the moneys on which have been allocated by them"; while another chairperson indicated that the school committee's power had been eroded by the Education Board and Department of Education, resulting in expanded bureaucratic control (Davey, 1977, pp. 24–25).

Similarly, some secondary school boards of governors, comprising both parent and community representatives, referred to the issues being dealt with by their boards as trivial, 'run of the mill' housekeeping matters (Barrington, 1985). Again, the term 'rubber stamp' was cited, "we never get to grips with education matters; the staff, Education Department, architects decide everything, we rubber stamp"; "schools are run by teachers for teachers"; "important thinking and policy formation regarding education takes place in the minister-department-principal-staff line; school boards are, to all intents and purposes, outside that, like a small child playing with a ball on the side-line at a rugby test match, it makes no difference whether she/he is there or not" (Barrington, 1985, p. 28).

Davey's (1977) findings underscore the core function that was expected of parents by schools, that of supporter. Commencing from the advent of New Zealand's compulsory schooling system, parents were viewed in relation to their obligation to the state for their child's school attendance, and for the election of school committee members and boards of governors (McKenzie, 1982). Developing from this stance, and notably once teachers were acknowledged as the professionals (McKenna & Millen, 2013), the parent as supporter role primarily involved fundraising activities for the school, along with tasks such as supervising trips, providing classroom and library support, and assisting with schoolground projects and working bees. The activities that form what Martin and Vincent (1999, p. 144) describe as "active volunteerism" are, as a rule, defined by the school and, in general, undertaken by parents with the requisite capital (social, cultural, economic). Bonne and Stevens (2017) advocate that these types of voluntary duties remain a fundamental part of what many contemporary New Zealand parents, and others, consider parent-school engagement to be, and a level at which many schools continue to operate at.

Emphasising parental concern about inadequate communication with schools, especially in relation to the educational progress of their children, Shallcrass (1970) observed that these matters were comparable to those raised in British reports (e.g., the Plowden Report on Children and their Primary

Schools (Department of Education and Science, 1967, p. 30), which advocated educational policy should unequivocally support parents to become more actively involved in their children's education; "they should be partners in more than name"). However, within the New Zealand context, Shallcrass (1970) advised that, despite a growing receptivity to the concept of schools working more closely with parents, there was still an ingrained perspective from educators that parents should be kept out of schools to reduce the risk of their interfering in professional matters.

6.2.2 1972-1975: A call for parental participation in schools

As part of the second National Government's three-stage programme to reassess the education system, the need for strong parental participation in schools was advanced by the 1972 Working Party on Organisation and Administration of Education, chaired by the Hon. A. H. Nordmeyer. The Working Party's Report (the Nordmeyer Report), in calling for a guarantee that school policy was not being made by professionals in isolation, but was explained to and supported by parents, recommended that local schools should be run by local people. In addition, it was advocated that governing bodies of schools needed to be representative of the ethnic, gender, and social makeup of their communities.

A general election in 1972 resulted in the new Labour Government's Minister of Education altering the format of the previous government's three-stage reassessment programme (Department of Education, 1974). A scheduled Priorities Conference was accordingly replaced by an Educational Development Conference, focusing on people talking to one another about education, rather than the 'educational establishment' speaking to each other.

The 1974 Educational Development Conference was undertaken via nationwide regional meetings and seminars, with 'ordinary New Zealanders' invited to discuss the type of education system they wanted moving forward. An estimated 60,000 New Zealanders participated in over 4,000 regional groups, with parent-school involvement emerging as a key issue in the regional discussion groups (Cumming & Cumming, 1978). Emphasising that the lack of communication between parents and schools was a "serious educational defect", and that many parents were unclear about what schools were doing and why, the Conference's subsequent report, *Directions for Educational Development* (the Holmes Report), included the recommendation that parents and the wider community, "from the lowest levels upwards", should be encouraged to participate more fully in educational decision-making (Advisory Council on Educational Planning, 1975, p. 44).

Acknowledging widespread public concern with some areas of the education system, the Holmes Report asserted that "a greater sense of partnership in education among schools, parents, the media, and other sections of the community" was required (Advisory Council on Educational Planning, 1975, p. 15). The Holmes Report recognised that many teachers and other educationalists were apprehensive, not only of the implications for them of greater lay participation in the administration of schools, particularly in decisions on staffing and programmes, but also from an ideological standpoint regarding parent-school interaction. While the Holmes Report indicated that parents and teachers were natural enemies, "predestined each for the discomfiture of the other", it affirmed that improving contact and cooperation between the school and parents was a responsibility most principals conscientiously attempted, but perhaps lacked the skill and training to operationalise (Advisory Council on Educational Planning, 1975, p. 44).

6.2.3 1976: Moving towards partnership

In 1976, the third National Government's Committee on Secondary Education presented its final report (*Towards Partnership*), which included 69 recommendations. The Chair, Hon. Sir Terence H. McCombs (former Minister of Education from 1947 to 1949 in the first Labour Government), noted that the review of secondary education was in part a response to a worldwide call to establish closer working relationships between schools and their communities, with "the partnership between public and profession holding out many known and unknown possibilities" (Committee on Secondary Education, 1976, p. 2).

The McCombs Report identified significant flaws in the delivery of education, along with considerable public dissatisfaction, particularly at the local level. Underlining the substantial decision-making power within the Department of Education, the isolation of the regional education boards from their communities, and the lack of effective parent-school involvement, the McCombs Report pointed out that schools were responsible for educating students in partnership with, as well as on behalf of, parents and the community (Committee on Secondary Education, 1976). Community was defined in the McCombs Report as (1) people living in a geographic area together, and (2) people who shared social connections and cultural values (Committee on Secondary Education, 1976).

In examining the need for closer cooperation between schools, parents, and communities, the Committee on Secondary Education looked at the elements of the school system that impeded closer working relationships with parents and community groups (e.g., parental involvement with schools

was restricted to inconsequential matters or low-level assistance) (Committee on Secondary Education, 1976).

Noting that education is a cooperative enterprise, shared by both parents and teachers, the McCombs Report prescribed that, as an initial step, schools had to explain their actions and objectives to parents and the community. In particular, the report's recommendation 7.1 emphasised:

> Parents be closely concerned in the education of their children and that secondary schools help parents to take a responsible part in this education. The Government should take immediate measures to encourage better communication and greater co-operation between teachers and parents and the community. Each secondary school board, staff, and Parent-Teacher Association should try to establish this partnership through increased community knowledge of and involvement in the school, and through extending the role of the school in the local community. (Committee on Secondary Education, 1976, p. 101)

Additionally, the McCombs Report maintained that effective cooperation depended on teachers, parents, and the community being able to participate in decision-making, rather than simply being told what was happening. The committee asserted that parents' feelings of unfamiliarity and uneasiness with schools needed to be dispelled. In the same way, the committee advised that teachers' perceptions of "being under a microscope" in respect to parental engagement required remediation (Committee on Secondary Education, 1976, p. 30).

6.2.4 1984-1986: Reviewing how schools and the community should work together

During the 1980s, a considerable amount of public discussion about education was centred on the official, or 'core', school curriculum. In March 1984, this debate culminated in the release of the third National Government's policy document, *A Review of the Core Curriculum for Schools*, with a short eight-week timeframe provided for public submissions. This document played a part in focusing attention on education and positioning it as a priority when a 'snap' election was called on 14 June 1984 (Codd, 1988). The opposition Labour Party pledged to restart discussions on the topic and to extend the consultation period. When Labour won the election on 14 July 1984, the new Minister of Education established a broader representative group to reopen the curriculum review, along with a provision for more public discussion (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987).

In November 1984, the fourth Labour Government's Minister of Education, Russell Marshall, established the Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools. To collect a diverse range of views on educational objectives, the committee consulted widely, over an 18-month period, with individuals and groups, including parents, school committees and boards, teacher organisations, students, and Māori and Pasifika communities (Codd, 1988). Following the identification of seven key issues, the Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools published and distributed a series of issues booklets (150,000 copies of each of the seven booklets) to promote public discussion and written responses (Codd, 1988). The committee also involved national and local media (e.g., radio, television, print), plus an array of organisations (e.g., McDonald's printed special placemats, for use in their fast-food restaurants, with information about the review) (Roulston, 2005).

By the committee's 31 January 1986 deadline, 21,500 submissions had been made. After the release of the committee's draft report in July 1986, a further 10,000 submissions were received (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987). Responding to Review Issue No. 5: '*Relationships: How should people in schools and the community work together?'*, parents disclosed they felt isolated from the day-to-day running of their school and the curriculum (e.g., "families have a lot to give but are too often ignored, or are unsure of how to offer their help" [p. 34]; "parents should be involved, the more they know about the school (what and how it is taught), the better will be their cooperation and the more the school will become a part of the community" [p. 104]) (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987).

Moreover, parents described the unapproachability of teachers. For example, one response, which was representative, stated "our local school is saying, we are the professionals, we know best, don't question too much, we will defend ourselves to defend our good name" (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987, p. 101). In response to the question on how teachers and parents could communicate more effectively, one teacher advocated, "by getting rid of the 'teacher knows best' syndrome, which is slowly disappearing, but which still has some way to go … by teachers learning to admit that sometimes parents know best" (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987, p. 106).

The final 128-page document, *The Curriculum Review*, released in March 1987, proposed a national curriculum based on 15 principles (that the curriculum should be common to all schools; accessible to every student; non-racist and non-sexist; able to ensure significant success for all students; whole; balanced; of the highest quality for every student; planned; cooperatively designed; responsive; inclusive; enabling; enjoyable) (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987). In conjunction

with the national common curriculum principles, 99 implementation recommendations were made, including the need to increase parental involvement in schooling and to broaden the role of the school in the community. The report's foreword noted that "learning happens best when there is an active partnership of students, teachers, families, and the community" (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987, p. 8).

As documented in the Curriculum Review, parents claimed that those elected to manage their school did not fully represent their community, resulting in the community not being informed about activities and therefore unable to influence decisions. The committee accepted that while the machinery for representation existed in principle, in practice it favoured a small group, which was "likely to be male, Pakeha, and articulate" (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987, p. 36).

Advocating for balanced representation in the management of schools, the committee affirmed that "elections, selection, and meeting procedure must enable all people, regardless of gender, race, or age to feel confident and comfortable in participating" (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987, p. 108). Accordingly, the committee identified that steps were required to co-opt when the electoral process did not result in balance, along with measures to ensure all groups could afford to take part (e.g., payment of expenses and attendance fees, provision of childcare) (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987).

Directing attention to six issues, the committee concluded discussion on Review Issue No. 5 (How should people in schools and the community work together?), observing that:

> Parents have said that they want more say in the schooling of their children. They say schools should be an important part of the community. Teachers have said that they welcome community help and ideas. The will to form a strong partnership is there.
> (Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools, 1987, p. 109)

In a 1987 report to the Minister of Finance, the Treasury analysed the suitability of the Curriculum Review's recommendations. Although acknowledging several positive aspects of the review, Treasury concluded that, overall, the recommendations were inadequate as they incorporated "unstated and narrow assumptions as to the nature and sources of education", overlooked the relationship between education and the economy, and did not address management and consumer choice issues (Codd, 1993, p. 76).

6.2.5 1986: The Parliamentary Education and Science Select Committee

In 1978, the third National Government commissioned a review of the teaching profession, including issues concerning teacher registration, discipline, and the power of boards of governors to dismiss teachers. Chaired by former Prime Minister Sir John Marshall, the recommendations in the *Report of the Committee on the Registration and Discipline of Teachers* (the Marshall Report) were not implemented due to opposition from teachers regarding some of the proposed measures. The failure to make changes, particularly in respect to disciplinary action for poor performing teachers, meant that parental submissions to the Marshall Committee were not resolved (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1998).

Eight years later, in 1986, the issues highlighted in the Marshall Report were taken up by a Parliamentary Education and Science Select Committee, which presented the results of its *Inquiry into the Quality of Teaching in New Zealand Schools* (the Scott Report). Chaired by Labour MP Noel Scott, a former school principal, the cross-party select committee (which included the Opposition's spokesperson on education, Ruth Richardson) examined growing public concern about the teaching profession and high levels of student failure (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1998).

The Scott Report considered the teaching profession's place in the education system, particularly focusing on the subject of 'provider capture'. This issue centred on what was seen as a close, possibly interdependent, relationship between teachers' professional groups and the Department of Education, predicated on the frequency of movement of senior staff between the two organisations (Dale & Ozga, 1993).

Noting that at times parents felt unwelcome in schools, hindered by inadequate information, shut out by 'professional expertise', or overlooked in the decision-making process concerning their children's education, the Scott Report called for schools to be more communicative with parents and to consider the parent-school relationship as that of "equal partners to achieve quality education" (New Zealand Parliament, 1986, p. 24). This point is reflected in Section 6.5.7 of the Scott Report:

> There is little confidence in the effectiveness of the current systems of accountability, or their integrity. Many community members feel that the standards of performance and the judgement of those standards are controlled by the self-interest of the profession. Teachers are seen as judge and jury in their own cause. The opportunity for community input and influence is very limited. (New Zealand Parliament, 1986, p. 39)

The Scott Report received limited attention when it was published in 1986; only becoming a focus of interest when it was used by the Opposition (National Party) education spokesperson, Ruth Richardson, during the 1987 general election campaign.

Earlier, in July 1985, the Labour and Education Select Committee had presented its report on the Education Amendment Bill, which in due course became the *Education Amendment Act 1985*. The Bill's objectives were to legislate for parents to be consulted on the revised health education curriculum prior to its implementation by schools, to authorise school boards to determine whether the health programme should contain a sexuality education component, and to uphold the right of parents to withdraw their children from sexuality education programmes (Department of Education, 1985; Shaw & Millar, 1991).

The government maintained the provisions in the Bill represented a consensus of the submissions provided to the Select Committee, but Ruth Richardson disputed this and presented two contrasting perspectives. The first position (expressed by the New Zealand School Committees' Federation, New Zealand Parent-Teachers' Association, and New Zealand Education Boards' Association) stressed the need for a voluntary partnership between parents and the school, while the second viewpoint (represented by the submissions from the two teachers' unions) proposed that the final decision about curriculum content should be made by the teaching profession, in partnership with the educational establishment (Richardson, 1985).

In the same time period, within the post-compulsory education sector, the 1987 *Report on the Management, Funding, and Organisation of Continuing Education and Training* (the Probine-Fargher Report) recommended the concept of competitive, devolved learning institutions, controlled by councils elected by the local community (Office of the Minister of Education, 1987).

6.2.6 Relevant contemporary documents

Each year, the Ministry of Education produces a Statement of Intent, outlining how it will undertake its work programme and monitor progress. In the initial statements, parental engagement in education was identified as one of three priority outcomes, establishing that parents have "high expectations of and support their children's learning"; that they will have "informed, positive relationships" with schools as part of that support (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 33). In addition, it

was noted that schools are required to build "purposeful collaborative relationships with parents, family and the community" (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 24).

References to parents and the community have been made in each Statement of Intent since their inception in 2003. For example:

> Schools are required to report twice a year in plain language to parents. This is intended to assist parents to become active participants in their children's learning and improve relationships between school and home.
> (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 15)

> A new approach to community engagement will bring together supply (education providers) and demand (children, young people, parents, families, whānau, iwi, and communities) partners. This will include supporting families and whānau to engage in their child's learning, and helping communities and iwi to be more informed. Community and education partnerships are key to improving outcomes for children and young people, and their parents, families, whānau, and iwi.
> (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 40)

> Effective partnerships between parents and education professionals will improve the well-being, behaviour, and achievement of children right into adulthood. This is a significant component of our strategies: *Ka Hikitia: Accelerating Success; Tau Mai Te Reo; Pasifika Education Plan; Whakapümautia Papaköwhaitia, Tau ana: Grasp, Embrace, Realise; and Success for All: Every School, Every Child.* A community that takes ownership and leadership of education success for its young people provides for lasting change.
> (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 21)

The focus on parental engagement in the Ministry of Education's Statements of Intent was brought into other key documents, including the New Zealand Curriculum through the principle of community engagement (Ministry of Education, 2007) and the Schooling Strategy 2005-2010, which set out three priority areas for action (e.g., families and whānau nurturing their children's learning) (Ministry of Education, 2005).

Following the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD, 2012b) *Education Today 2013* report, which recommended member countries increase parent participation in school and improve home/community-school relations, New Zealand's Parliamentary Education and Science Select Committee initiated an inquiry into engaging parents in the education of their children. The Inquiry's terms of reference included 1) investigating elements of an effective strategy to engage

parents, families, whānau, aiga, and communities in education; 2) identifying best practice for supporting parents and communities; and 3) finding ways to leverage the strength of communities to lift the education achievement of students in their community (New Zealand Parliament, 2014). In adopting the committee's 18 proposals, the government acknowledged a majority of the recommendations aligned with current or planned work programmes (New Zealand Parliament, 2015).

In 2015, the Education Review Office (ERO) undertook a study on parents who demonstrated 'educationally powerful connections' with schools. These connections were defined by a learning-focused approach and a reciprocal exchange of knowledge between parents and educators. The study assessed the influence of these connections on students at risk of under-achievement (Education Review Office, 2015). The construct of educationally powerful connections and relationships constitutes one of the six domains specified in the School Evaluation Indicators, which delineate the characteristics of effective schools. These indicators are intended for application in both school-led internal evaluations and external reviews conducted by ERO (Education Review Office, 2016).

The concept of educationally powerful connections was reiterated in *Pae Aronui: Supporting excellent outcomes for every child through educationally powerful partnerships* (Ministry of Education, 2018). Emphasising the importance of parental engagement in securing higher standards and improved educational performance, the document notes "effective partnerships that involve parents, whānau, families, employers, iwi, hapū, learners, and education providers strengthens the education system's ability to improve education outcomes for all children and young people" (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 4).

6.3 Genealogical Strand 2: The inception of neoliberal policy

Tamboukou (1999) underscores that the purpose of Foucauldian genealogy is to disrupt the past and challenge understandings. From this perspective, the aim is to open up the possibility for changing the present by understanding (more fully) what it is. Rather than searching for elemental beginnings, Bevir (2008, p. 263) determines that "genealogy [instead] serves a critical purpose, exposing the contingent and 'shameful' origins of cherished ideas and entrenched practices".

The study's second genealogical strand focuses on circumstances that contributed to the extensive social and economic policy reforms under the fourth Labour Government (1984-1990). A defining feature of the changes during this period was a move from notions of inclusivity, the public good, and state provision, to a rationality based on truths associated with the economy, the market, human

capital, and the "businessification" of the individual and education sector (shaping the conduct of conduct along entrepreneurial and competitive lines) (Hill, 2004, p. 504).

This involved the reimagining and reformulation of domains previously considered to be non-economic, including education. Foucault (2008, p. 242) refers to this as "the economisation of the entire social field", whereby markets come to be the new 'truth' for governing populations.

6.3.1 The economic situation

By the early 1980s, New Zealand faced weakening trade conditions and a deteriorating balance of payments position. Seeking to safeguard the economy, the third National Government introduced a progressively complex system of regulations and controls, culminating in wage and price freezes (Kelsey, 1997). Questioning the performance of the New Zealand economy, the Secretary to the Treasury, Noel Lough, in an unconventional move, tasked a group of economists within Treasury to investigate alternatives to a government-controlled economic system (Scott, 2001). The options developed included a free-market monetarist approach. Perris (1998, p. 4) notes that Treasury kept these "alternatives on the shelf, pending a request by some future government for different ideas".

On 14 July 1984, Labour won the general election with a sizeable majority. The fourth Labour Government took office, with David Lange as Prime Minister and Roger Douglas as Minister of Finance. Within days, the incoming government was confronted with the immediate need to devalue the New Zealand dollar (Scott, 2001). Assessing that the financial crisis could be best solved by adopting market-oriented policies and greater economic liberalisation (e.g., opening up markets to competition, lifting market restrictions), the new Finance Minister, working conjointly with Treasury and the State Services Commission, set out to reduce government intervention in the economy and to dismantle most of the controls and regulations that had accrued (Perris, 1998). During his government's first term, Lange (2005, p. 192) characterised the relationship between the Minister of Finance and Treasury as "a perfect marriage … they were always hand in glove".

The government adopted an intentional policy of rapid change, thereby limiting time for opposition to its economic and social reform programmes. In a speech to the Mount Pelerin Society (an organisation advocating free-market economic policies), Douglas (1989) deconstructed his reform strategy into 10 principles. The second of these 10 principles stated that reforms should be implemented in 'quantum leaps', as moving step-by-step enabled vested interests to mobilise; while the third principle affirmed the importance of speed, "it is impossible to go too fast" (Douglas, 1989, p. 3).

6.3.2 The 1987 education review

The fourth Labour Government claimed the expansion of government bureaucracies had caused overspending, thereby contributing to the national economic crisis, and that improvements in the public sector would increase efficiency, accountability, and transparency (Boston et al., 1996). Treasury identified education as one of the areas of culpability for economic challenges, noting there was no place for increased expenditure on educational goals that had no identifiable economic return (The Treasury, 1984, 1987a).

Partly in response to Treasury's examination of the rate of return on the nation's investment in public education (i.e., value for money), the government announced, on 21 July 1987 (one month before the general election), the establishment of a taskforce to review education administration. The taskforce's terms of reference were based specifically on management structures and cost-effectiveness, and did not include curriculum, teaching, or assessment related issues (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). The review was endorsed by Treasury and the State Services Commission (and their Ministers) as a means of placing education on the government's agenda for action. The proposed review was also intended to counter public criticism of the education system, which was potentially damaging to the government's 1987 election campaign.

Drawing on the 1986 Parliamentary Education and Science Select Committee's findings on the quality of teaching in New Zealand schools, Opposition spokesperson Ruth Richardson made education a focus of the National Party's attack on the government's policies. Basing its education manifesto on a 1983 United States National Commission on Excellence in Education report (*A Nation at Risk: The imperative for educational reform*), the National Party claimed that New Zealand's deteriorating education system had serious ramifications for students, the country as a whole, and the economy (Grace, 1991). Employing the slogan "bold, innovative, and far-reaching reforms", and communicating a sense of national emergency, Richardson emphasised the need for greater consumer choice, more accountability to parents by schools, increased measures to improve literacy levels, and robust governance systems to replace the Department of Education's highly centralised and interventionist style of management (Grace, 1991, p. 31).

Under an umbrella of international neoliberal educational think tanks (Doherty, 2007), the New Zealand Business Roundtable, with a membership of predominantly chief executives, was established in 1985. Firmly endorsing neoliberal economic and social reforms, the New Zealand Business Roundtable produced a wide range of publications (books, reports, submissions), alongside an

Education Forum to convey a view grounded primarily in minimal state intervention in education, strong competition, and enhanced consumer choice (Roberts, 1998).

6.3.3 The Treasury's and State Services Commission's perspectives on education

Observing that the Department of Education was a "lumbering dinosaur" and that the Minister of Education, Russell Marshall, was not the appropriate person to champion education, Prime Minister Lange took over the portfolio following his government's re-election in 1987 (Lange, 2005, p. 245). This move signalled the Prime Minister's intention that the reform of education was to be given priority during his government's second term. According to Perris (1998, p. 8), by retaining the education portfolio himself, Lange made it difficult for other Ministers (e.g., the Minister of Finance) "to move in on education" (i.e., undertaking a policy cutting, slashing, burning, and/or privatising education exercise). After the 1987 election, the Prime Minister/Minister of Education received the Department of Education's Briefing to the Incoming Minister, a 154-page summary of current and long-term issues. The Minister also received a detailed 294-page briefing on education from Treasury.

Notwithstanding the favourable report of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) examiners in 1982, noting considerable 'client satisfaction' with the overall performance of the New Zealand education system, together with substantial quality of provision (OECD, 1983), Treasury's analysis asserted the system was inefficient, bureaucratic, self-serving, and impeding community decision-making (Codd, 1990).

The Treasury's education briefing extended over a complete volume of the two-volume *Government Management: Brief to the Incoming Government* (BIM). Volume I of the BIM addressed growing economic concerns, including the effects of high inflation and trade deficits on the government's progress in market deregulation (The Treasury, 1987a). The first volume also contained a chapter on education, highlighting four key issues: who pays, who chooses, who benefits, who is accountable (The Treasury, 1987a).

The preface to BIM Volume II, Education Issues, noted that the separate brief on education policy had been prepared because of the complexity of the issues involved and the importance of the education sector to broader matters of social equity and economic efficiency (The Treasury, 1987b). Treasury argued that, rather than being protected, educational services were like other goods traded in the marketplace, and stressed the need for a different perspective from the past, which had produced a

system that was inflexible, slow to react to changing circumstances, and lacking in choice (The Treasury, 1987b).

Suggesting that a reason for the schooling system's poor performance was because teachers and the education establishment pursued their own self-interests instead of the interests of students and parents, Treasury proposed that, through the process of consumer choice, markets would enable public entities, like schools, to be disciplined by the discretion of individuals, rather than by established interests (The Treasury, 1987b). Consequently, professional, bureaucratic, and union groups (e.g., teacher organisations, Department of Education) would have fewer opportunities to exercise monopolistic control over what happened in education, to the exclusion of other stakeholders (e.g., parents). Concluding that such a monopoly was inefficient and that reform was not possible if it was directed by vested institutional interests, Treasury advised:

> In schooling, as with any other service, there can be no presumption that monopoly state provision is either equitable or efficient in meeting the diverse needs of children. More contestability in provision would tend to make it easier to exert greater pressure on schools to reach the high standards that families want … Given the inherent limitations of primary schools as an educational source, the state cannot deliver if the partnership between school and family is not good. By capturing virtually all available state intervention for itself, the institutional sector is ensuring that the potential of the family resource is in many cases not fully realised, particularly among the disadvantaged.
> (The Treasury, 1987a, pp. 138–139)

Correspondingly, the State Services Commission's task to restructure government departments was based on a premise that central government agencies were too large, along with their ineffectual provision of policy advice and its timely and efficient implementation. For example, submissions received by the government-appointed Taskforce to Review Education Administration (1988) pointed to the education system being cumbersome, slow to make decisions, and unclear. The education reforms consequently became a part of the overall public sector reform agenda, predicated on a corporate model, with a particular focus on outputs and outcomes, rather than inputs.

6.3.4 Realigned aims of education policy

From the late 1970s, international agencies (e.g., the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank), through their cross-

national connections, called for the restructuring of national education systems, within a global market context. For example, the OECD raised concerns about schools failing to produce the type of workers needed for nations to participate in the international marketplace (Olssen et al., 2004). A central premise of the proposed educational restructuring measures was that increased productivity and efficiency of well trained, flexible workers would provide an advantage for nations competing in the global marketplace (Dale, 2005). In addition to defining the agenda and discourses around policy, the transnational agencies highlighted that nations would be left behind if they were unable to adopt progressive educational practices (e.g., readjustments necessary to address presumed failures of education) (Olssen et al., 2004). The power of international agencies, according to Schugurensky (2003, p. 296), is predicated on the capacity "to concentrate research, funding, and policy formation under one roof".

The remodelling of education systems, as advanced by the OECD and other international organisations, as part of a global policy community, or network, was based on the concept of human capital theory, which asserts that capital investment in education leads to improved skills and knowledge for individuals and a dividend for governments. The establishment of human capital theory marked a departure from the conception of education as a public (social) good, towards education as an investment or an individual good (i.e., individuals gaining an economic advantage from receiving education) (Becker, 1993). Human capital investment in education was promoted to such an extent that it became, as described by Taylor and Henry (2000, p. 501), "a global discourse, shaping the parameters of policymaking in most countries".

To emphasise the harmful and infectious spread of this global educational reform model, Sahlberg (2012) coined the metaphorical acronym GERM (Global Education Reform Movement). Fundamentally, GERM epitomises neoliberalism as "an ideological hegemonic project" wherein adherence to neoliberal principles and ideas is "maintained by elite actors and dominant groups" (Springer, 2012, p. 136). On an international scale, the shift towards a market economy necessitated a profound reconsideration of established inter-relationships among education, learning, and work-related activities. Consequently, GERM emerged from the conceptualisation of knowledge as a commodity, thereby fostering increased competition among educational institutions in terms of student enrolment, parental choice, prescribed curricula, standardised testing, and the privatisation of public education (Sahlberg, 2023).

Within the context of New Zealand, the nation's educational agenda, driven by government policy directives, followed a parallel trajectory with the global reform model, exhibiting what Savage (2020, p. 149) terms a "family likeness" to other countries implementing GERM strategies. According to

scholarly literature, policy mobility is characterised not merely as a transfer but as a tendency towards "policy convergence", wherein similar policies are adopted across different nations (Ball, 2012b, p. 2).

Bourdieu (1998, p. 31) describes the neoliberal agenda as engendering a clear distinction between the social and economic domains, where the maximisation of economic growth and productivity becomes the "self-evident, … taken-for-granted, … ultimate, and sole goal of human actions". The assertion that New Zealand's future depended on the efficacy of its educational institutions mirrored the rhetoric found in the United States of America's 'A Nation at Risk' (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), Australia's 'Strengthening Australian schools: A consideration of the content and focus of schooling (Dawkins, 1988), and the United Kingdom's Education Reform Act 1988. An overarching theme underpinning each country's policy was the expectation of a return or benefit accruing from investment in education, manifested in both higher productivity and labour market earnings.

The neoliberal education reforms emphasised competition and choice within the market, and comparative performance within and across the nation's schooling system. The adoption of these reforms from other countries supports the OECD's assertion that educational improvement is facilitated through examining policies and practices implemented and achieved elsewhere. However, as Lingard (2010, p. 132) notes, "effective policy borrowing must be accompanied by policy learning which takes account of research on the effects of the policy that will be borrowed in the source system, learning from that and then applying that knowledge to the borrowing system through careful consideration of national and local histories, cultures, and so on". The absence of 'policy learning' prior to the implementation of Tomorrow's Schools and the self-managed school model of education underscores the underlying risk associated with the GERM logic; namely, that aspirational nations are encouraged to adopt and adapt policies and practices perceived to be beneficial in high-achieving countries without sufficient contextual considerations.

Although neoliberalism played a manifest role in the education reforms, it is important to draw attention to other changes that led to adjustments in thinking and operating during the time period. To this end, McKinlay (1990) suggests that it is uncertain if the government was following a consistent framework when initiating its programme of reforms. Concurrently, Boston (1991) warns against focusing solely on neoliberal influences, thereby overlooking other components. For example, as Edwards and Moore (2009) highlight, while implementing its neoliberal reform agenda, the government also undertook a socially progressive work programme, including homosexual law reform, a Nuclear Free New Zealand policy, and the establishment of a Māori land grievance resolution process.

6.3.5 Towards self-management

For a large part of the twentieth century, New Zealand's public education system was organised around a centralised bureaucracy. Individual schools belonged to an education system and it was the system, and the decisions related to it, that determined the school's operations. However, in 1989 this understanding was changed. The individual school was considered the key organisational unit of the education system (e.g., "individual learning institutions will be the basic unit of education administration") (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. xi).

Congruent with the emerging discourse of individual activity, autonomy, and responsibility, the regulatory concern with education developed around a managerial, market-oriented approach. In 1989, the government brought two Australian educational 'experts' (Brian Caldwell and Jim Spinks) to New Zealand to conduct seminars for principals and boards of trustees on the concept of self-managing schools. In Caldwell and Spinks' (1988, 1989) self-managing school model, importance is attached to management theory, which is broadly adapted from non-education sectors and implicitly applied to the schooling system.

Therefore, in Caldwell and Spinks' publications and presentations on what self-management specifically means in practice, together with international endeavours to achieve this goal, an unambiguous neoliberal link is evident. Ball's (1993b, p. 116) commentary on idealising management as self-management notes that:

> … books like Caldwell and Spinks' (1988) *The Self Managing School* create a professionally acceptable, but unreal, value-free world of consensus, collaboration, and self-control. … Here, collegial relations, collaboration, and participation are colonised by management discourse and purpose. As Blackmore (1990, p. 264) puts it: "the rhetoric of participatory democracy, as it relates to school-based decision-making, has been appropriated by 'corporate' logic". In these idealised portrayals, there is little evidence of conflicts between 'the financial' and 'the educational'. In this Mary Poppins world of self-management (a spoonful of sugar . . .) …

6.4 Chapter summary

In Chapter 6, a Foucauldian genealogical approach was applied in the review of key educational reports and evaluations undertaken during the 1970s and 1980s. The relevant socio-political, economic, and ideological contexts were identified, providing a frame of reference in which to locate the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents.

Based on social justice, corporate managerialist, and market models, the specific junctures when decisions were made by successive New Zealand governments were established in the two genealogical strands discussed in this chapter (the emergence of the parent-school partnership paradigm, and the inception of neoliberal policy).

WPR question three was challenging as it relies on genealogical analysis that can involve extensive and detailed research; it could, as Bacchi (2011) admits, be the focus of a whole PhD process on its own. I therefore followed Bacchi's (2011) suggestion to instead use an 'abbreviated' approach, where I referred to short accounts of developments that help to contextualise the 'problem' representations.

As identified, how the government thinks about something determines whether it is a 'problem', and if confirmed, what action should be taken to resolve the 'problem'. Drawing upon information generated in Chapter 5 (WPR question two) and Chapter 6 (WPR question three), the consideration of overlooked or silenced issues and perspectives in the government texts are examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7:

The issues left out, silenced, or marginalised

It is within the obligation to truth that it is possible to move about in one way or another, sometimes against effects of domination which may be linked to structures of truth or institutions entrusted with truth.

(Foucault, 1994b, p. 295)

7.1 Introduction

Bacchi's (2009) fourth WPR question (*What is left unproblematic in these 'problem' representations?*) assists in addressing what is missing in the problematisation. In doing so, it is possible to draw out silences, which supports the task of understanding how the representation of the 'problem' might be thought about differently to create critical disruptive space.

Accordingly, WPR question four specifically facilitates the examination of what silences and gaps are produced and maintained in the problematisation, thereby restricting what is knowable or achievable in response to the 'problem'. One of the principal actions from this question is to ask, "What fails to be problematised?" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 12).

Arguing that the central issue left unproblematised in the government texts is the elucidation of the term partnership, the chapter explores the various discursive silences and limits created by the avoidance of this issue. In doing so, it suggests that revealing what is left unspoken, and making misrepresentations explicit, enables a rethinking of the taken-for-granted construction of the 'problem', including determining if it could be thought about in a different way.

7.2 The unproblematised elucidation of the term partnership

The fundamental issue that is left unproblematised in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents is the specification of the term partnership. In stating that the running of the school will

be a partnership between the professionals and the community, the government texts present a vision of partnership that presupposes educators and parents are on the 'same page'. As discussed in Chapter 4, rather than specifying the meaning of the term, the documents imply that the parent-school partnership is advantageous for all parties.

Partnership is expressed in the government texts as a pragmatic and positive mantra, suggesting that when barriers are overcome, then partnerships provide solutions to most school problems. Conceptually, the term is part of, and merges with, a wider group of premises such as collaboration, cooperation, and networks. Terms that are all connected to discourses that support the notion that partnerships are located in trusting relationships, formed through constructive dialogue as neutral and reputed ways of organising people (Benn, 2010). Conversely, Cardini (2006) asserts that the contexts in which partnerships function make them a complex, ideological, and divergent social phenomenon.

Inherent in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents is an assumption that establishing a parent-school partnership is possible, without having to address underlying factors such as the differing characteristics, aims, and resources of partners. Likewise, there is no recognition in the documents that partnerships require a relationship based on trust and reciprocity (Lowe & Howard, 2010). Despite references in the Picot Report to consultation and feedback, working together with parents and the community, and ensuring a shared vision, the strategies in the report are largely one-directional, with a goal of increasing the community's knowledge of school practices, rather than the school's understanding of community praxis (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988).

Essentially, within the government texts, there is more rhetoric than reality about parents and schools working together as genuine partners. For example, in the texts, partnership incorporates terms such as 'a voice for all' and 'a shared responsibility' (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). These are aspirational terms, which may be difficult to achieve in practice when parents and the school bring their individual beliefs and understandings, predicated on their principles, attitudes, and expectations, to the concept of partnership. It is possible that in some settings, and for some parents, a partnership with the school is neither sought nor considered.

In practical terms, there are three dimensions to the way partnership is muted in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents. First, while the partnership paradigm in the documents emphasises the establishment of common agendas and objectives, the concept of partners, with diverse resources and skills, does not take account of the link between differences among partners and questions of power. Second, as the government texts represent a specific set of norms and values to be universal, they avoid considering how socio-economic factors might be relevant within the parent-school

relationship. Third, the texts not only leave the nature of the relationship between teachers and parents unquestioned, but they also reinforce the privileged position of the teacher as the expert.

7.2.1 The ignored role of inequitable power relations

The Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents overlook power relations, specifically where power lies and how control is exerted in the parent-school partnership. Both documents rely on objectivity to mediate the interactions between parents and schools, positioning relationships within the power structure as equal. This is in place of recognising that subjectivity and positionality within the school can be a powerful determinant in these interactions. In this regard, the essence of power dynamics between parents and schools juxtaposes with one of Klein and Dunlap's (1993) key criteria for successful partnerships, parity between partners.

Additionally, the parent-school partnership model visualised in the government texts fails to consider the central role the school has as an institution. In a sense, the partnership approach regards the school as a given, alternatively directing attention to parents and their different and unequal relations with schools. The question of the school, which is the institutional context that produces the parent-school category, is ignored. Accordingly, power relations between parents and schools are unequal because it is the school that frames how parental participation is structured and governed. Some parents are close to the 'school culture', while others are detached from it and, in the absence of intervention, do not take part in established and normalised channels of participation (Collet-Sabe & Tort, 2015; Prieto-Flores et al., 2018).

Consequently, if the structures of power and relations are not modified, new connections with parents that are more equitable are difficult to generate. Consistent with research undertaken by Olmedo and Wilkins (2017), without changing the institution's understanding of what parents are and are not, what they can and cannot do, and how teachers view them, among other factors, it is not possible to move towards a more equitable schooling system that includes all families and the wider community.

In discussing the value of parental and community participation in schools, the Picot Report highlights a sense of alienation and powerlessness by families and communities, within an existing inflexible centralised education system reliant on prescription and authority structures (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). The document points out that these groups perceive they have limited access to power in educational institutions, thereby restricting their opportunity to participate

in decision-making at the school level. Identifying at least six groups of people who feel powerless, the Picot Report notes:

> There were those who claimed that the system is specifically designed for one group of people, and some even went so far as to claim that the confusions are deliberate. Whatever the case, we believe many minority groups are justified in pointing out that the system suited another group better, which made it difficult for the minority groups to work successfully within it. … There were those who had been failed by the system in the past and felt alienated by it.
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 35)

The excerpt suggests that for some parents, their past experience of school means that the institution acts as a technology of power and can affect their involvement with their children's education. This relates to Bourdieu's (1986) premise that, from a cultural capital perspective, middle-class parents are predisposed to holding beliefs and experiences that align with the school's expectations, and to have had a positive connection with their own education. Conversely, lower socio-economic parents are more likely to have faced challenges with education and may subsequently encounter negativity when engaging with their child's school. From this position, notions of collaboration and shared responsibility, as embodied in the government texts, may be difficult to accomplish.

The Picot Report records that for many parents, who have themselves experienced being in school as students and 'obeying' the authority of the school, "are now reluctant to approach a learning institution for any reason at all" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 35). As Ball (1994) notes, the institutional and imposing presence of schools assists in rendering parents as less powerful in the parent-school relationship. Ball (1994, p. 21) reminds that schools tend to be concerned with demonstrating power and maintaining control in relation to "what can be said, and thought" and "who can speak, when, where and with what authority". Accordingly, Feiler (2010, p. 12) advises that the implications of not questioning the parent-school partnership concept may "impose school values on communities, thereby marginalizing some families even further".

7.2.2 The marginalised role of social inequality

The second way in which the government texts leave the context of the parent-school partnership unproblematised is through the inadequate attention to socio-economic differences in parental experiences. Brien and Stelmach (2009, p. 4) expound this point, noting that while the formalisation of parental roles in schools (e.g., boards of trustees) appears to have "a democratizing force by

ensuring all parents have a right to participate …", by not addressing the numerous factors that influence parental involvement, legislation can have "deprivileging, marginalizing, and disempowering effects".

In general, the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents ignore power differences and assume that if parents are provided with equal opportunities to become involved with the school, they can take up the option to participate. Missing from this concept is the realisation that not all parents share equal circumstances for capitalising on formal provisions for parent-school relationships. For example, unspoken in the government texts is recognition of the impediments impacting parents, such as family-based barriers relating to socio-economic circumstances and low levels of education, which play a part in parents feeling ill-equipped to effectively support their children's learning or to interact with schools, or, at times, contributing to differing understandings of the importance of schooling. Additionally, practical issues such as caregiving responsibilities, access to transport, or inflexible hours of work, limit parents' availability for school-based activities (Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2008). An opportunity is therefore missed in the government texts to identify and challenge the social arrangements that cause barriers.

It is too simplistic to discuss parents or the community as homogenous groups when it comes to involvement. Researchers who focus on social class and education have, for decades, detailed how parental background and family contexts shape the educational experiences of students across nations, particularly the ways in which schools reproduce social inequality. For instance, Bourdieu (1986), Bourdieu & Passeron (1990), Lareau (2011, 2015), Lawrence-Lightfoot (1978, 2003), and Feiler (2010), among others, all employ the construct of social and cultural capital to describe class differences and unequal power structures in the parent-school relationship. These writers underscore the point that schools have a preconceived notion of the ideal parent, and that social and cultural capital determines the way in which parents interact with schools.

While the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents accurately convey the premise that strong parental educational expectations are beneficial for student achievement, they are largely silent about the implications of parents bringing their history, traditions, and cultures with them into the parent-school partnership. This is despite acknowledging in the Picot Report that a majority of those making submissions to the taskforce expressed that the school structure was "so overwhelmingly Pakeha-oriented as to be incapable – even with whānau participation – of making the transformation necessary to accommodate Māori values and forms" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 66). Accordingly, the social and cultural circumstances of individual families, together with their situations at a given time, implies that some family practices and values have a closer correlation with those of the school setting than others.

Gorski's (2012, p. 314) thoughts on redressing inequalities are relevant in this instance, particularly where he notes that reform efforts seek to "fix poor people rather than the conditions that disenfranchise them". The Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents construct discourse that affirms parents as central players in their children's education. However, inequality among parents, shaped by their possession of certain types of economic, social, and/or cultural capital, is not acknowledged in the government texts. The notion that heterogeneous parents experience barriers suggests that institutional power (the power of schools) shapes and reinforces the normative (school-based) understanding of parental involvement (i.e., it is the school that determines the expectations, and the norm). A dichotomy between those who do not face barriers and those who do is subsequently produced.

Lareau (2011) describes middle-class parents as purposefully nurturing the skills necessary for their children's school-related and employment success, as well as being able to capitalise on opportunities to interact with and have influence over educational practices. This is what Ball et al. (1999, p. 211) refer to as having cultural capital "in the right currency" to convert into positive results at school. For instance, studies demonstrate that middle-class parents are more likely to take advantage of opportunities to interact with and have influence over their children's schooling, by means such as well-resourced schools and choosing carefully targeted educational programmes; advocating on their children's behalf in school; ensuring access to books, computers, and tutorial assistance, sustained by economic capital (Calarco, 2018; Gaztambide-Fernandez & Maudlin, 2015; Lareau, 2011, 2015).

In line with this perspective, parents' knowledge of the schooling system suggests they are not approaching the education market as equals. Referencing Bourdieu's work on cultural capital, Park and Holloway (2018) underline this point, noting that lower socio-economic parents' ways of thinking (sets of dispositions) do not correspond to the behaviours and practices of schools, as the social norms of schools are based on dominant middle-class values. Notably, in the section on equity issues in the Tomorrow's Schools policy document, advantaged parents from the dominant middle-class group are invisible and unproblematised, which from one perspective normalises their specific parental involvement practices, but from another standpoint, obscures the role they play in their children's education.

In the government texts, the conception of schools being receptive to parental participation ignores a bias associated with normalising one 'good' way for parents to participate in the school, while simultaneously labelling as negative many other forms of parental involvement. Viewing parental deficits as the cause and obstacle for non-participation fails to consider the elements that define what participating means (or does not mean), together with what the right or wrong ways of participating

in the school are. In particular, schools, with middle-class teachers, together with the parents with whom they share the same dispositions, take for granted that there is one 'good' model of parental participation (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Based on this perspective, schools cast aside and discredit other ways of being and relating in the school. This results in the 'other parents', whose forms of participation and connection to the school are not included, recognised, or accepted, becoming what is termed 'hard to reach' (Antony-Newman, 2019).

Setting out the blueprint for the Tomorrow's Schools policy, the Picot Report records that the "education system has been slow, in the past, to recognise the aspirations of other cultures" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 4). In the report, one of the four core values identified as critical in the new education administrative structure is 'cultural sensitivity'. The Picot Report states:

> Education must be based on the notion of a partnership of equals. Partnership implies incorporating the organisational styles and procedures of other cultures in the day-to-day work of the institution. Only by such a reaching out – accompanied by the need to listen and change – will progress be made.
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 4)

Considered through a social justice lens, this excerpt is unproblematic; especially given its emphasis on 'reaching out' and 'listening and changing'. The subsequent paragraph in the Picot Report moves to reproach a schooling system that could lead to individuals outside the cultural mainstream experiencing "personal and social dislocation that makes learning difficult, if not impossible" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 5).

Although the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents refer to the importance of learning at home, the documents say little about how this should be achieved. This is a salient omission, as parents are predominantly involved with their children's education in the home environment. Research shows that elements of the home setting (e.g., establishing expectations, discussing school issues, providing educational activities to enhance school success) advantageously shape the school experiences and achievement of students (Hamlin & Flessa, 2018; Jeynes, 2012; Lareau, 2011). Ignoring this form of involvement invalidates non-dominant groups of parents (e.g., working class, ethnic minority), who, it is shown are more comfortable being involved in their child's education from home (Stitt & Brooks, 2014; Tang, 2015).

Importantly, Feu et al. (2017) discuss how amongst parents of middle-class backgrounds there are differences in their relationships with schools. Some, due to income, knowledge, and immediacy to the school, participate fully, while others, despite sharing the same social class as the school, are less

involved. As such, there needs to be an adjustment to the oversimplified dichotomy that there are 'the parents' and 'the other parents'. Within both groups there are different degrees of proximity in relation to the school. In this regard, Feu et al. (2017) argue that even participation by parents closest to the school is superficial. That is, parents closest to schools (e.g., participating on school boards, parents associations) are allowed, in general, only cursory participation. They are provided with few opportunities, places, and powers that go beyond expressing their opinion (board of trustees) or organising activities that are adjunct to the school (parents association).

7.2.3 The unquestioned role of the professionals

The third illustration of silence centres on the parent-school relationship. The Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents emphasise the importance of parents as partners and active participants in their children's education. From this perspective, partnership provides the opportunity for parents to be involved. However, notwithstanding formal opportunities for parents to participate (e.g., board of trustees), institutional barriers, such as firmly entrenched beliefs about professional expertise, obviate parental involvement beyond non-intrusive activities (i.e., defined tasks that do not relate directly to a teacher's professional duties).

Advocating that the proposed reforms will not significantly change the role of teachers in schools, the Picot Report notes:

> Teachers will still work with organisational patterns and goals largely as they are now. There will, however, be changes of emphasis and changes in the nature of relationships between teachers and the community. This will both increase the sensitivity of teachers to the views and wishes of their community, and also give teachers a good deal more satisfaction in their working and professional lives.
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 52)

The readiness of teachers to work with parents is unvoiced in the texts. This silence is pertinent because, as the Picot Report's findings illustrate, parents who experience barriers in their communication with schools are left feeling uninformed, dissatisfied, and powerless. In its examination of the schooling system, the Picot Report highlights the difficulties parents have in finding basic information, resulting in "an erosion of confidence and an undermining of the likelihood of effective cooperation between institutions [schools] and consumers [parents]" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 28).

The hierarchical positioning of teachers within the schooling system endows them with considerable authority relative to parents. This dynamic is underpinned by the specialist knowledge and expertise possessed by teachers, which allows them to set the agenda and shape the framework of interactions and discussions regarding educational matters (Antony-Newman, 2023). In this context, the lack of requisite knowledge or familiarity that characterises the position of some parents automatically places them in a subsidiary role within the parent-school relationship. A study undertaken by Ranson et al. (2004, p. 272) concludes that "the social space that schools establish for parental involvement is limited and typically shaped by deep codes that reinforce professional authority and parental deference – a structuration of legitimate authority that is taken for granted".

The diffidence in the government texts means that the dominant narrative of the teacher, as the 'professional who knows best', is not called into question. For instance, the Picot Report states, "this does not mean that the community, through the board of trustees, will tell teachers how to teach … teachers are trained professionals who have the tools and skills …" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 45). Consistent with Tveit (2009), all parents, regardless of positioning within the parent-school construct, are impacted by the embedded practices of professional superiority (i.e., the teacher-as-expert possessing a body of professional knowledge). Consequently, as Comer (2005) and Hancock (1998) point out, the hegemonic strength of the teaching profession's protection of their domain, along with the reluctance of parents to interfere in teachers' work, illustrates the extent to which traditional constructions of the parent-school relationship are so accepted and taken-for-granted that it is difficult to envision alternatives.

The Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents position the 'professionals' as the expert, but, at the same time, the documents consistently refer to the parent-school relationship as a partnership. It is Gee's (2015) contention that teachers, on commencing their career, enter into an established hierarchical power structure as they are introduced to certain values, perspectives, and language as part of their socialisation into the profession. Positioned as the professionals within this structure, Gee (2015) claims that teachers acquire authority and status that informs how they talk, think, and act. Foucault (2003) likens this positioning to the role of the pastor, describing it as a tool to maintain social compliance where the pastor knows what is best for the congregation.

In emphasising that institutions (schools) often place those with knowledge (teachers) in a privileged and unquestionable position, Foucault advocates the individual with expertise in a specific discipline consequently becomes the "universal intellectual", with their knowledge emerging as universal truth (Rabinow, 1984, p. 23). This is in line with Pushor's (2007, p. 3) assertion that the parent-school connection is unquestioned, placing "educators as holders of knowledge and parents as recipients of their knowledge".

In the government texts, the lack of focus on teachers, their beliefs, and amenability to work with parents is a notable omission. Recent studies by Antony-Newman (2019, 2020, 2023) highlight that a matrix of socio-economic conditions, ethnic backgrounds, and the traditional division of labour between professionals and non-professionals, contextualises the parent-school relationship. This is consistent with Nash's (1993, 1999, 2000) seminal work on schools operating within a centric model privileging white middle-class norms and deferring to 'professional' educators.

7.3 Chapter summary

Highlighting the central issue left unproblematised in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents; namely, the elucidation of the term partnership, Chapter 7 examined the various discursive silences and limits created by the avoidance of this matter. To this end, in respect to partnership, three components marginalised or silenced were identified.

First, the government texts overlook power relations, specifically where power lies and how control is exerted in the parent-school partnership. Second, aspects of social inequality are afforded little or no attention in the representation of the parent-school relationship, thereby effectively erasing or denying the existence of social and economic factors. Third, the government texts not only leave the relationship between educators and parents unquestioned, but they also reinforce the 'teacher-as-expert' model.

Articulating the nature of these silences and gaps, and bringing invisible issues into view, this chapter has generated space for rethinking the taken-for-granted construction of the parent-school relationship. Moreover, the chapter has strengthened the contestation of the Tomorrow's Schools discourse developed through WPR questions one to three (identification of the 'problem' representations, investigation of their conceptual underpinnings, examination of their geneses).

While the objective of Chapter 7 was to reflect on and consider issues and perspectives overlooked or silenced, the following chapter calls attention to the effects that are produced by the 'problem' representations (e.g., how they control what can be talked about as relevant, shape understandings of the issues, and impact on lives).

CHAPTER 8:

The effects produced by the 'problem' representations

There are always possibilities of changing the situation.
We cannot jump outside the situation, and there is no point from which
you are free from all power relations. But you can always change it.
(Foucault, 1997, p. 167)

8.1 Introduction

The previous WPR questions applied in this thesis have laid the groundwork for question five. The study commenced with an explanatory chapter considering the representation of 'problems' in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents (WPR question 1, Chapter 4). By subjecting the government texts to multiple forms of questioning, the study examined the underlying assumptions and rationalities of the 'problem' representations (involving a form of Foucauldian archaeology) (WPR question 2, Chapter 5), how the representations arose (employing Foucauldian genealogy) (WPR question 3, Chapter 6), and what was left unproblematic or silenced in the 'problem' representations (WPR question 4, Chapter 7).

The fifth question in the WPR framework, namely *What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?,* facilitates the examination of problematisations to determine where and how they work to help some and harm others (Bacchi, 2009). Appraising the effects, however, does not mean the evaluation of policy impacts or measurable outcomes in the traditional sense, but rather is a way of engaging in discussion about where the problematisations have led and where they may subsequently lead (Bacchi, 2009).

Chapter 8 brings together elements from the previous questions by highlighting the interrelated effects produced by the 'problem' representations; namely, the discursive effects (limiting what can be thought and said in relation to the 'problem'), the subjectification effects (the processes that produce subject positions, with some groups seeing themselves as different to others), and the lived effects (the material impacts on the lives of policy recipients) (Bacchi, 2009). These three effects overlap and interact with each other. Accordingly, this aspect of the WPR analysis functions as an investigative tool to appraise the practical implications of a problematisation, both for policy and for people's lives.

8.2 Responsibilisation and the individualising of blame

The concept of governmentality, how governing is thought about in relation to the mentalities, instruments, and practices of government, correlates with the underlying power relations and governmental rationalities in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents. In this regard, Foucault's (1991a) representation of the conduct of conduct is evident; in particular, the shaping of individual and group behaviours, with notionally defined objectives. A key component of this is self-conduct or the governing of the self. Within a neoliberal form of governance, individuals are expected to self-invest and take responsibility to sustain their productive capabilities. Foucault (2008) refers to this form of self- governance as responsibilisation.

Neoliberal governance functions on the assumption that individuals are competitive, endeavouring to gain advantage not only through participation in the economy, but also through all facets of their lives (Foucault, 2008). This notion of the individual has profound implications for how the state seeks to govern its population, and how individuals endeavour to govern themselves. In line with this, the government texts reflect the rationality of responsibilisation, which involves transferring the responsibility for change to individuals, with the government's role moving to the promotion of social norms and the development of behaviour change measures. In the Picot Report, one of the four core values considered necessary for the new education administrative structure encompasses the discourse of responsibilisation:

> What is required is a system which will allow individual institutions to respond to the specific needs of their community and which has clear lines of control and responsibility. … The intention is to form a partnership between the community, the learning institution, and the government, which will reinforce the mutual interests and cooperation that should inform our most important national endeavour. … They must also be accountable for the decisions they make.
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, pp. 5–6)

Associated with this core value is a neoliberal form of subjectivity, emphasising social norms based on individual autonomy, choice, and responsibility. Grounded in this premise, self-empowered individuals are considered to be rational agents, who, given the freedom of choice, are adept at making the 'right' decisions to further their own interests and those of their family, along with taking responsibility for the choices they make. This perspective is amplified in the Picot Report's discussion on the presumption of individual competence encouraging the "development of initiative, independence,

personal responsibility, and entrepreneurial abilities" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 4). Recognising individuals as active, productive, and self-managing, within a discourse of responsibilisation, is indicative of Foucault's (2008, p. 226) observation that neoliberal governmentalities position the individual as "an entrepreneur of himself".

Self-directed behaviour is subsequently an intended result of the responsibilisation technologies of governmentality, whereby parents are expected to make appropriate choices to actualise their children's potential, including turning education into next-level benefits (e.g., financial security and opportunity). Consequently, parents assume responsibility for ensuring their children receive a 'good' education. 'Good', as defined by Gordon and Whitty (1997), is analogous to schools in predominantly white, middle-class areas. If they do not step up to the plate, so to speak, then it is deemed the parent has exercised poor judgement in the choice of school and/or failed to change the school by asserting authority (e.g., using their voice).

Writers on this subject note that parent-school engagement policies, particularly those focused on partnership, represent a strategy for making parents responsible for their children's success or failure at school (see, for example, Crozier, 1998; Jezierski & Wall, 2019; Paniagua-Rodriguez & Beremenyi, 2019; Stooke, 2014; Thomas et al., 2015). Within a neoliberal paradigm, parents are designated consumers of products (e.g., educational services) that can be provided by the market, which they have the right and freedom to choose, based on quality measures (e.g., a school's performance) and personal preference criteria (e.g., a parent's ethical perspective). As a result, parents are viewed as entrepreneurial choosers and investors in their children's education, instead of being considered entitled to equal access to quality education in all schools.

As projected in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents, the discourse of responsibilisation links to the lived effect of moving culpability from central government to the local level, for example, schools, boards of trustees, parents. By affirming that schools are responsible for managing their own budget, for maintaining their buildings and grounds, for employing teachers and other staff, and for setting their own objectives within national guidelines, the responsibility for outcomes is thereby framed in localised terms. Accordingly, if the outcomes are unsatisfactory, then blame can be shifted from the government to self-managing schools and their boards of trustees on the grounds that they have not made appropriate use of the decision-making power and resources devolved to them. This move provides what Hess (2003, p. 65) refers to as a "level of political insulation". Conversely, as Cardini (2006) suggests, if outcomes are positive, the state can benefit politically from this success as the government presents itself as responsible for the policy.

8.3 Decision-making and the community

At a New Zealand School Trustees Association conference, Newport (2000) used the phrase 'parent power' in his description of the parent-school relationship and the sharing of power to achieve a common purpose, with partnership providing an opportunity for parents to participate in school decision-making. Following the release of the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents, against a backdrop of increasing parental disaffection and powerlessness, compelling rhetoric was judiciously orchestrated and nurtured by the government to persuade the public that the reforms would give schools and their communities more control. This point is exemplified in the Picot Report's concluding remarks:

> Parents, learners, and the community will have greater opportunity to influence the kind and quality of education offered. They will also have greater responsibility for helping reach their community's – and the nation's – education objectives.
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 98)

The government texts meld the devolution of decision-making with an increased commitment to equitable community participation, whereby decision-makers are as close as practicable to the effects of their decisions. This grassroots approach reflects the belief that responsibility will be effectively exercised when the people tasked with making decisions are also the people responsible for implementing them (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988).

A widely circulated passage from the Picot Report (executive summary: features for a new structure) states:

> An effective administrative system must be as simple as possible and decisions should be made as close as possible to where they are carried out. Because the State provides the funds and retains a strong interest in educational outcomes, there must be national objectives and clear responsibilities and goals. To ensure these goals are reached, decisions must be made in a co-ordinated way in a structure in which decision makers have control over the available resources and are then held accountable for what is achieved. Finally, the structure should be open to scrutiny and should promote responsiveness to client demands.
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. xi)

On a general level, the excerpt operates, despite some jargon (e.g., promote responsiveness to client demands), as an edict for the involvement of parents and the community in the school system. The Tomorrow's Schools' slogan 'local autonomy within national guidelines' was, according to McQueen (1991), carefully selected by the government in order to facilitate moving control to the community level, while retaining both national and local components; specifically, "local decision-making should be within national objectives, which are an expression of the national interest as opposed to purely local interests" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 42).

While the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents express themes of parental and community empowerment and partnership, they also interlock with neoliberal theories promoting individualism, competition, choice, and marketisation. Accordingly, rather than authentic engagement, parental and community participation is built on performative and compliance-based provisions. Dissimilarity between the participatory modalities is evident in Tomorrow's Schools; on the one hand there is rhetoric about having more community involvement in decision-making, while on the other hand, there are measures for greater central control (for example, policy decisions, auditing, reporting, and measurement).

Parental participation, via board of trustees involvement in school governing and accountability mechanisms, outwardly fulfils the role of maintaining public oversight. Through this responsibility, parents are persuaded that they have an active role in substantive decision-making. However, while parents may assist in determining the school's purpose and priorities through the school charter, there is limited scope for innovative dialogue, dissenting opinions, a collective consideration of alternative ideas, or influence on educational policymaking at the national level. Therefore, suppositionally, a core function of the school board may purportedly be to 'rubber stamp' centrally-determined policies.

Notably, in the government texts, the school board of trustees responsibility matrix implies a reconfigured understanding of what a 'good' parent board member looks like (i.e., one that is eminently insular, favouring an individual with professional skills and experience, who can contribute to strengthening a school's governance expertise). Results from a study by Voisey and Asquith (2021) show that the higher the socio-economic status of school trustees, the greater the degree of good governance practice. Not unexpectedly, schools with parents from skilled professions (e.g., lawyers, accountants, company directors) have considerable proficiency and confidence in decision-making amongst their membership (i.e., board members from high socio-economic backgrounds may have strong networks and business / management experience) (Voisey & Asquith, 2021). These findings are in line with Bevir's (2012, p. 118) assertion that "… many forms of collaborative governance strongly favour the wealthy, the more educated, and those who belong to dominant racial and ethnic groups".

As a consequence, parents as board members are classifiable through a dividing practice that sets skilled parents apart from unskilled parents, placing importance on professional skills in areas such as management, finance, procurement, and marketing. Voisey and Asquith (2021) note that some schools, especially those in lower socio-economic areas, struggle to attract what Wilkins (2016, p. 97) describes as "fit for purpose" parents. It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, that the inequitable distribution of cultural, social, and economic capital amongst parents is mirrored in the differential allocation across school boards, with governance playing a role in the comparative advantage or disadvantage of schools.

The perceived fairness of the board of trustees selection process masks the fact that certain groups of parents have neither the time, resources, nor confidence to stand for election. Wylie's (1997, 2007, 2009, 2020) research, emphasising difficulties experienced by schools in securing trustees, recognises increased demands on time (e.g., paid employment, family commitments) as an impediment on a parent's ability or willingness to support school activities (e.g., attending board meetings, fundraising). Despite such constraints, the appearance of a democratic structure (board of trustees) validates the government's objective of parents playing a larger role in their local schools. Specifically, the target to devolve decision-making to the community level is prioritised, rather than an emphasis on the effective participation of parents in their children's education.

Subsequently, involving parents in the governance of schools, via operational autonomy, elicits different possibilities for the parent-school connection. However, these opportunities advantage a specific grouping of parents, whose skills and backgrounds are considered to be valuable forms of investment for the school. Fundamentally, the board of trustees model manifests as the core configuration for parental participation in school decision-making processes. Nevertheless, the limitations on trustee numbers, and the challenges of representativeness, mean that school boards do not offer a comprehensive form of participation for parents in educational decision-making.

8.4 The system is explicitly designed for one group of people

Many of the points raised in the Treasury's 1987 Brief to the Incoming Minister on education issues were not new (e.g., questioning the role of the Department of Education, suggesting school board membership reflect the community's composition, recommending parents have greater say through increased autonomy), with similar matters having been specified in the 1962 Currie Report, 1975 Holmes Report, 1976 McCombs Report, and 1987 Curriculum Review. These concerns had not been

addressed because, as Treasury observed, the education system was unresponsive, monolithic, and self-serving (The Treasury, 1987b).

The rationality of Treasury's economic precepts, and their broad acceptance by the government, shaped the specific context within which the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents were produced. Expressly, linking education to economics, through human capital theory, calculates and classifies all areas of a person's life as a measurable commodity. Consequently, as Brown (2015, p. 10) specifies, "all conduct is economic conduct" (i.e., all aspects of life are framed and measured by economics).

Based on the assumption that everyone seeks personal economic benefit, human capital theory constructs the individual as capital, and education as a key component for ensuring advantage in a competitive global market (Fitzsimons, 2015). As an individual is evaluated as a calculable resource or commodity for economic advancement, they are categorised and positioned at either end of a cost-benefit market value spectrum (i.e., economically active (useful) individuals at one end of the spectrum, and those who are not at the other end). From this standpoint, a person's principal objective is to produce, consume, and develop in an economic sense, while the role of the state is to ensure economically advantageous conditions are accessible to everyone (Brown, 2015).

Additionally, in Treasury's Brief to the Incoming Minister, education is considered a market similar to other public services, which, if opened up to competition, will improve the quality of the product, including student achievement (The Treasury, 1987b). While the introductory statement in the Tomorrow's Schools policy document asserts that the reforms will lead to "improved learning opportunities for the children of this country" (Minister of Education, 1988, p. iv), the link between Tomorrow's Schools and improved educational achievement is not explicitly defined in the government texts.

In September 1989, speaking in Parliament at the second reading of the Bill (*Education Act 1989*), the Minister of Education substantiated this point:

> It [the government] never thought for a moment that such a change in administration inevitably would result in some benefit to the quality of learning. The government had evidence that showed that a child did prosper and did thrive in an environment in which parents and care-givers were more intimately involved with the educational establishment and in an environment that was felt to be supportive. However, there was no warrant in that to assume that the child would flower to the point at which he or she could be deemed to have been, I suppose, the enhanced product of a change in education administration. (Lange, 1989, p. 12712)

Foremost in the government texts is the framework for dividing practices, whereby different groups of people, or different sets of behaviours, are categorised. Such practices, including dividing good parents from bad parents, involved parents from uninvolved parents, socially acceptable parents from socially unacceptable parents, compound inequalities, which Vincent (2017, p. 548) calls a "classed and raced" understanding of what it means to be a good and participating parent. As a result, parent-school involvement can implicitly shape parents' subjectivities (i.e., the way people think of themselves) by elevating specific types of good parents, while suggesting that other groups are bad. In this narrative of the good parent, once the realities of the model are widely accepted as truth, this truth becomes a fixture in the circulating discourse.

This point is strikingly demonstrated in section 3.6 of the Picot Report, which identifies the experiences of lower socio-economic communities within educational institutions. Despite being beneficial for certain students, Openshaw (2009) points to the Tomorrow's Schools reforms having contributed to maintaining, and even widening, disparities in the schooling system (e.g., the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged schools, or as Gordon (1994, 2015) delineates, the system of 'rich' and 'poor' schools). This is consistent with Snook et al.'s (1999, p. 1) observation that "a polarisation of schools [has occurred]: middle-class parents have deserted schools in poorer areas; the poor (particularly Māori) have been left behind". As a consequence, the outlook in the following excerpt remains as applicable today as it was in 1988.

> The effects [on students] are that they lack confidence; they are denied the respect of the wider community; and they are shut out by those who control employment and the opportunity for a fulfilling life. The differences among communities are worse than the overall statistics. Taking metropolitan Auckland as an example, we were told that, in Southern Auckland, half of the 26 secondary schools had more than 25 percent of their pupils leave with no qualification. On the North Shore, however, only one school out of 15 was in that position. Worse, in Southern Auckland, seven of the 26 schools had more than 50 percent of their pupils leave with no qualifications. There was no North Shore school in that position. In the worst case of all, one South Auckland school had more than 80 percent of its pupils leave with no qualification. This kind of clustering of failure is certain to lead to personal, social, and economic catastrophe. It cannot be allowed to continue.
>
> (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 36)

While the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents are based on the concept of choice and competition delivering effective educational opportunities for all, the government texts do not address the key social determinants of poor educational outcomes, including inadequate housing, poor access

to healthcare or transport, and lack of social support. Despite considerable research over the years documenting the divisive social consequences of the education marketplace (refer, for example, Ball, 1990, 1994; Lauder, 1990; Nash, 1999, 2007; Nash & Harker, 2005; Reay, 2001), links between recurrently poor educational outcomes and patterns of disadvantage in some communities continue to produce both segregation and inequality within the schooling system.

In April 2018, the sixth Labour Government established an independent taskforce to assess whether the governance, management, and administration of the New Zealand schooling system was still fit for purpose. As Adamson (2022) points out, this was the first time an extensive review of compulsory schooling had been commissioned by a government since the implementation of the Tomorrow's Schools reforms in 1989. The taskforce's overarching premise was that while some students succeeded, other students were disadvantaged by the education reforms (Adamson, 2022). Notably, the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce's (2018, p. 11) report states that "[T]here is no evidence to suggest the current self-governing schools model has been successful in raising student achievement or improving equity as was intended by its originators".

In advancing a parent-school partnership approach, the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents do not take account of factors such as unequal power relations between schools and families, or the class-based nature of the good parent model. Accordingly, Tomorrow's Schools, a policy purported to bring parents and schools together, compounds alienation, exclusion, and marginalisation, particularly for those parents who do not share the same cultural and social capital as the school. As reiterated by the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce (2019, p. 13), "it is clear from evidence accumulated over the last thirty years that our schooling system does not help all children and young people to fulfil their potential".

8.5 Partnership as an exercise of disciplinary power

The Tomorrow's Schools reforms involve power-knowledge practices; produced from technologies that engender viewpoints, concepts, and taken-for-granted truths about education (knowledge), unequal relationships and effects between agent and subject positions (power), and different subjectivities and understandings of parents and schools. For example, as agents, parents govern by means of their involvement on school boards; through their 'holding to account' via the board's reporting and monitoring role. As subjects, parents are 'held to account' for the educational choices they make for their children and how they participate in their children's schooling. This exemplifies what Foucault (1991, cited in McKay & Garratt, 2013, p. 746) refers to as the "paradox of liberalism",

whereby "individual liberty and freedom exists always in tension with the requirement for ever greater regulation and control, giving rise to the government of conduct". Operating through the conduct of conduct (Foucault, 1991a), there is an interplay of what is considered acceptable parental participation with other behaviours deemed unconventional.

The absence of questioning the everyday effects and implications of neutral labels, such as the parent-school partnership, may, as Feiler (2010) points out, undermine or overlook parental practices and values, thereby marginalising some parents. The Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents, in promoting a partnership between parents and schools, do not take account of the unequal power relations between schools and parents, or the class-based embodiment of the good parent model. By not addressing these issues, the government texts assist, perhaps unintentionally, in moving partnership into a technology of disciplinary power over parents, particularly those who do not inherently follow the good parent model.

This disciplinary power is achieved by way of discourses that establish the 'norm' and regulate ways of talking, thinking, and acting (Bacchi, 2009). Through the construction of truths, discourse enables the formation of systems and hierarchies whereby the behaviour of an individual can be judged as normal or abnormal, and compared with that of others (Gutting, 2005). Consequently, populations, groups, and individuals are 'othered' as more or less acceptable, as specific concepts of truth come to dominate or are normalised. (McKay & Garratt, 2013). As McCloskey (2008, p. 27) emphasises, dominant discourses are generally "so entrenched in the everyday life that they go unnoticed"; thereby people are often unaware of the influences of particular discourses on their own thinking. While the resulting norms may be used to regulate and rank the behaviour of others, these norms have greater leverage in the way individuals internalise them as taken-for-granted assumptions and employ them to monitor and define their own behaviour (Foucault, 1980).

Being aware of what is normal or abnormal ensures that individuals self-regulate to remain within the parameters of a discursively constructed normality. Specifically, parents, in terms of being governed, disciplined, and shaped into good parents, conform to certain behaviours and adopt particular norms and values that match those of the school (Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997). The prevailing paradigm of the good parent and the good parent-school relationship is, as Baeck (2010, p. 324) specifies, "imprinted with the culture of the middle classes", encompassing a selection process in which parents are measured against a middle-class standard. This point is illustrated in McKay and Garratt's (2013) assemblage of examples of how parental involvement in the United Kingdom has been classified, then normalised, and, subsequently, governed through policy discourses.

Although the Tomorrow's Schools reforms may have been predicated on the intention of generating different relationships between parents and schools, in essence the parent-school connection, as advanced in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents, is an exercise of disciplinary power, predicated on drawing lines of distinction and setting up hierarchies between what is good and what is bad, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, what is normal and what is abnormal.

8.6 Chapter Summary

In Chapter 8, the interrelated effects produced by problematisations were explored. Starting from the premise that a policy discourse shapes particular subject positions and social relationships, the chapter established that the discursive clarification of problematisations has ramifications for how individuals think about themselves and others (i.e., policy has real effects on the population, particularly on groups who do not have the same cultural, social, and/or economic capital). Specifically, the effects of 'problem' representations provide the foundations on which they can be judged; that is, whether they are satisfactory or harmful. By defining certain phenomena as problematic, policy not only describes "effects *in the real*" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 18, emphasis in original) but helps to construct perceptions of people as problems (e.g., who are meritorious and useful, who are deficient or destructive), together with which actions should be rewarded and which should be penalised.

Collectively, the effects discussed in Chapter 8 are in line with Foucault's (1982) notion of dividing practices; a concept that delineates how groups of people can become divided between each other as they are being shaped as governable subjects (e.g., good parents / bad parents, socially acceptable parents / socially unacceptable parents).

As detailed in this chapter, an overarching goal of WPR question five is to identify which aspects of the problematisations have harmful effects and consequently need to be reimagined. In the next chapter, WPR question six considers the role of contestation or resistance practices, explicitly asking how specific 'problem' representations can be deconstructed and rethought.

CHAPTER 9:

Conclusion

I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am.
The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning.
If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end,
do you think that you would have the courage to write it?
(Foucault, 1988b, p. 9)

9.1 Introduction

Chapter 9 serves two purposes. First, it completes the study's inquiry by addressing the first part of WPR question six (*How/where has the 'problem' representation been produced, disseminated, and defended?*). As the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents communicate and corroborate the government's actions to the public, they constitute the official channel for the promulgation and rationalisation of problematisations. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss how the documents assume a meaning making function, which implies the government's representation of 'problems' holds a level of currency or validity in the public domain (i.e., they operate as truth statements) (Bacchi, 2009).

The second part of WPR question six (*How could the 'problem' representation be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?*) is then discussed. Accordingly, this section opens up space to challenge ways of thinking that have come to be seen as natural or normal; the purpose being to contest dominant discourses and allow alternative possibilities to be envisioned, deliberated, and presented. Within this segment, I also explore Bacchi's (2009) directive to engage in a self-problematisation process to unpack my own representations and assumptions.

In the concluding section, the chapter appraises the methodological contribution that can be realised by applying a Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist approach to the analysis of policy, and more specifically by employing Bacchi's (2009) WPR model. In addition, the chapter reflects on the study, considering its broader implications before focusing on potential areas for future research.

9.2 WPR Question 6(a):

How/where has the 'problem' representation been produced, disseminated, and defended?

Question 6(a) of Bacchi's (2009) WPR framework highlights the role of the two processes emanating from the interaction between rationalities of government (political rationalities) and technologies of government (political technologies). Governmental technologies represent the programmatic and technical means, or as Miller and Rose (2008, p. 32) specify, the "humble and mundane mechanisms", employed by the government to transform political rationalities into everyday life. It is through the convergence with technologies that political rationalities become operable (Rose & Miller, 1992). Accordingly, in assisting to shape what is possible to think, governmental technologies constitute a material dimension of discursive practices.

Noting that governmental technologies are the key medium through which policies are realised or enacted, this section applies a second data source; namely, press releases relating to the publication of the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents. Designed to promote and validate the government's actions and rationale to the public, thereby shaping public opinion, this medium operates as an official means through which problematisations are dispersed and upheld, and by which meanings are made to "stick" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 33).

In advocating "that to make progress, radical change is now required", the Picot Report asserts that the schooling system is in disarray and requires substantial restructuring (i.e., a perception is created that a crisis will occur if changes are not made) (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. xi). It is subsequently through the media that the assumption of educational failure gains currency; and, as a result, the framing of an adversity, such as a national educational emergency, generates a sense of urgency for some form of action from the government. The discursive effect promulgated is that education, and consequently New Zealand's future, is at a critical juncture. This premise is what Slater (2015) describes as socially constructing a crisis, whereby educational policies are promoted through the portrayal of either a fabricated or naturally occurring national crisis. The ubiquitousness and subsequent normalisation of the educational emergency aligns with Ahmed's (2004, p. 133) observation that its "designation … as [being] already under threat … becomes installed as 'the truth'".

Presented in a public-relations-oriented format, with simple and direct language, the Tomorrow's Schools accompanying media text, *Tomorrow's Schools: Dispelling the myths*, states that "every day longer we wait is another day during which we expose our children to the inequalities of the existing system" (Office of the Minister of Education, 1988, pp. 6–7). In this text, utilising rhetoric that is responsive to parents, attention is directed to the government's education administration reform being more 'democratic', allowing for increased parental and community involvement, and providing for greater educational opportunities (e.g., "students will be the prime beneficiaries of Tomorrow's Schools because the quality of education has been shown to improve with the type of reforms being introduced here") (Office of the Minister of Education, 1988, p. 3).

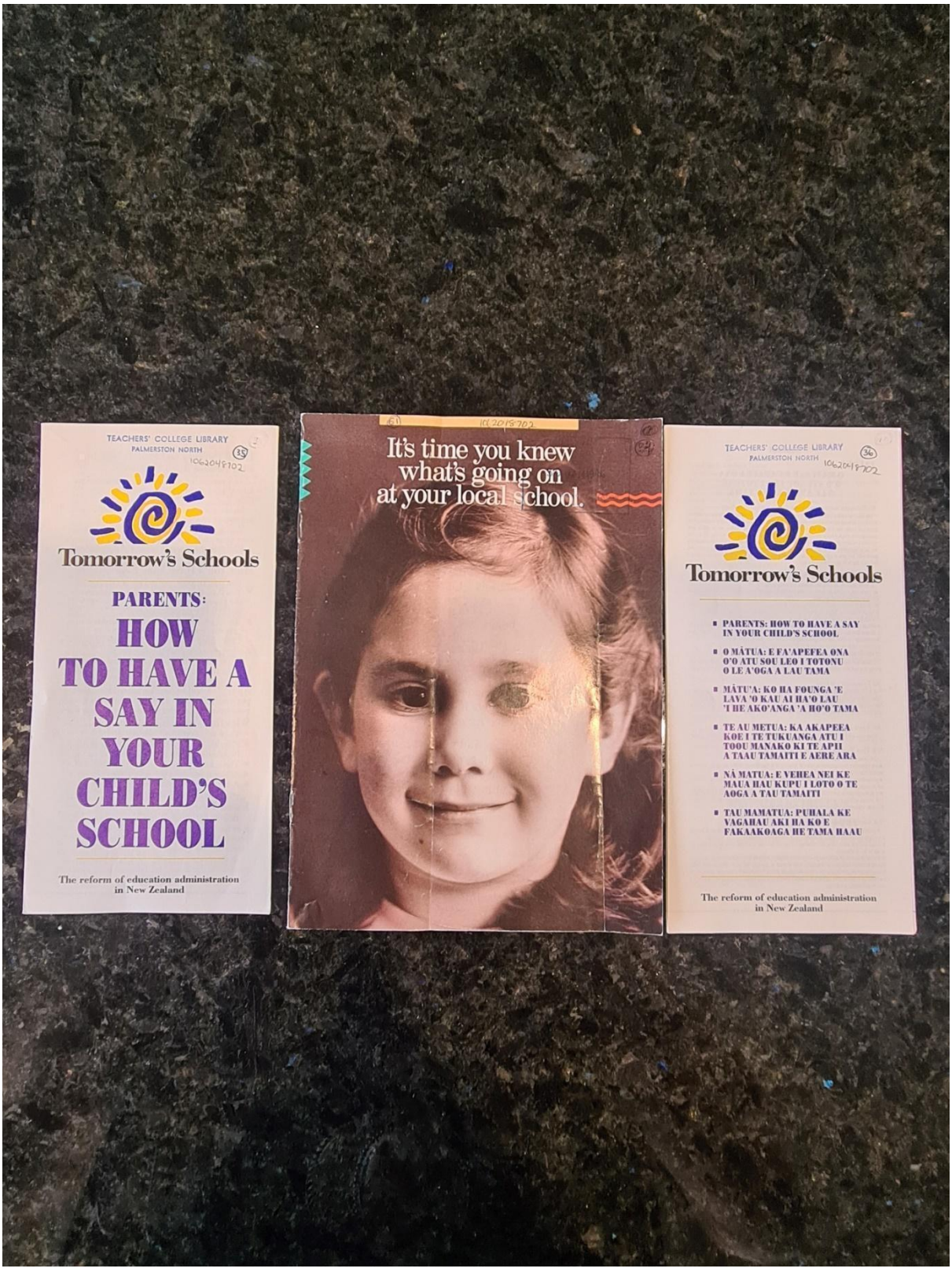
Specifically focusing on the new role of parents in the schooling system, the concept of self-management is positioned in the media-related material as centrally important (e.g., *Group support Picot's nod to self-rule*, The Evening Post, 12 July 1988, cited in Roulston, 2005, p. 156). Using consistent terms and comparable narratives, the media presents the problematisations similarly to their representation in the government texts, suggesting, as advocated by Bacchi (2009), that shared language circulates broadly, thereby achieving validity as forms of truth.

By way of a judiciously managed communications budget, including the use of public relations consultants to market the Tomorrow's Schools policy, a targeted advertising campaign was undertaken using television, radio, and the print media, along with 'champions' speaking at public meetings, particularly in small towns and rural districts (McQueen, 1991; Openshaw, 2011). Codd (1990, p. 201) correlates the media's reporting of the reforms to a well-managed campaign, where schools and the public are "persuaded by a skilfully orchestrated media presentation that the major Picot proposals [are] both necessary and beneficial".

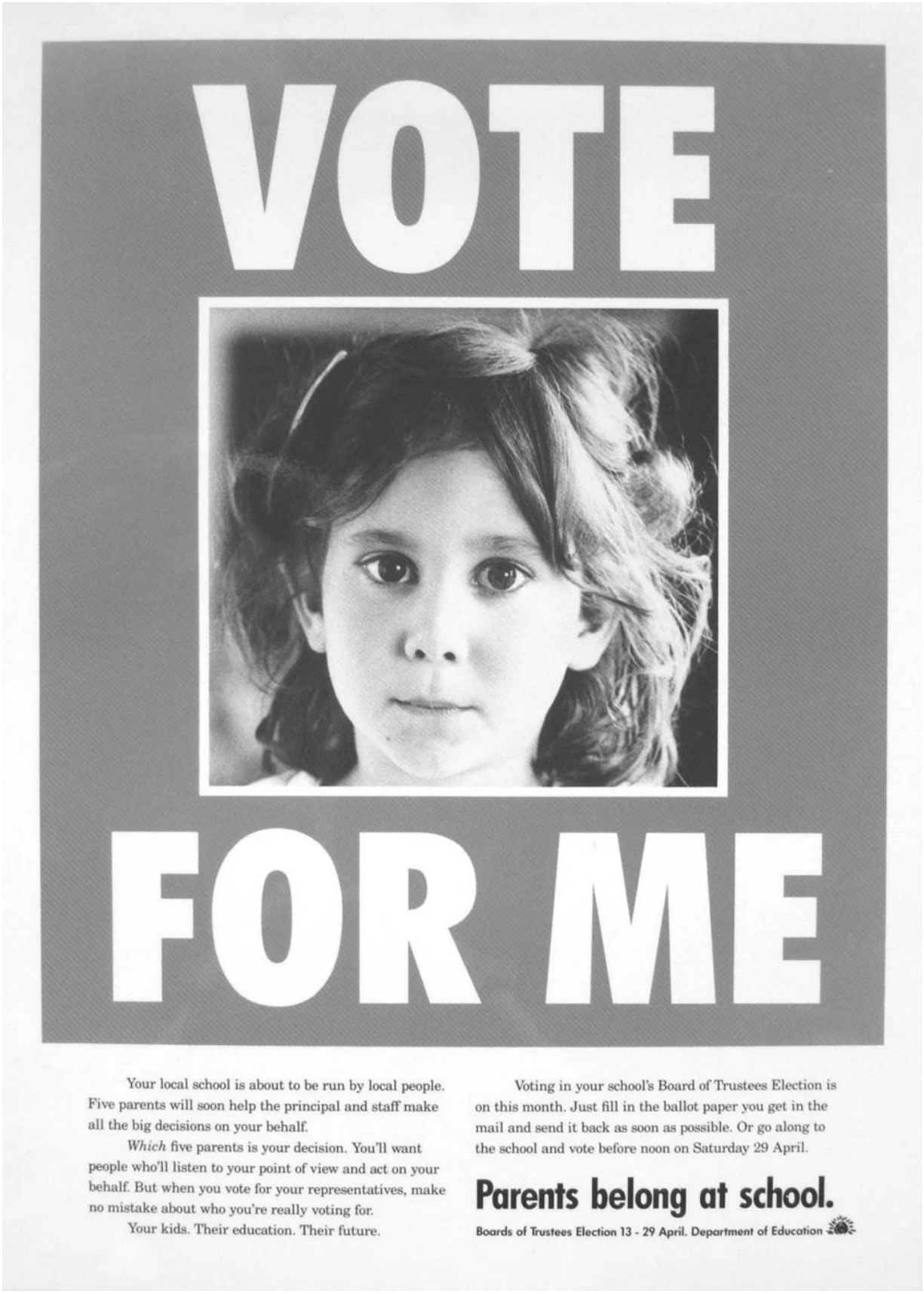
The comprehensive advertising campaign reinforced the board of trustee's role. An example of the material used in the marketing promotion is provided in Figure 5. Parents were advised that they should not question their ability to participate on a school board, with the Tomorrow's Schools media text noting that Dr Brian Caldwell, "an expert in the field, who visited New Zealand to advise on our reform process, says the basic skills required by board members can be learned in a two-day seminar" (Office of the Minister of Education, 1988, p. 3).

Figure 5

Tomorrow's Schools Advertising Campaign Material



(Source: Archives New Zealand)



(Source: Archives New Zealand)

One advertisement on television assured parents that "If you can manage one of these [showing a child], you can manage one of these [showing a school]" (Gordon, 1992, p. 188; Robinson et al., 2003, p. 266). At the time, this claim was supported by the dominant themes in the print media, which promoted financial advantages for schools, along with the parental benefits of consumer choice, partnership, and more equitable access to schools (Roulston, 2005). For example, while a 10 May 1988 article in Wellington's daily newspaper, *The Evening Post*, notes that the "education shake-up could save $93 million in administration costs", a second report in the same newspaper emphasises the closer relationships schools and communities will have (Roulston, 2005, p. 150).

On 3 April 1989, Prime Minister David Lange issued a media statement reminding the public that the inaugural board of trustees elections would close at the end of April. In this communique, the Prime Minister notes:

> The major aim of *Tomorrow's Schools* is to give parents more say in the education of their children. Local people, parents, and teachers will work together in partnership for the good of the children in the particular school. This reform reverses a century-old trend of centralising education. … By building upon the existing strengths of our schools, they will enhance our children's learning. And they will give a lot more parents the opportunity to be involved in democratic decision-making. This is real responsibility which people are being given. … As a parent myself, I have never doubted parent interest. And as I have travelled the country speaking and listening to parents and teachers, that feeling has been reinforced. Parents do want to be involved. What is needed in the new Boards is common sense and a concern for the well-being of children. Parents have this. … I urge all of you to vote. It is your opportunity to have a say in the school your child attends. New Zealand will be a better place for these reforms.
> (Office of the Minister of Education, 1989)

Linking to WPR question three (*How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?*), the sixth question, in addition to examining how problematisations reach their target audience and achieve validity, also supports investigation of how the 'problem' represented can be redefined, thereby contesting problematisations deemed harmful (Bacchi, 2009). In the following section, question 6(b) considers possibilities for challenging the 'problem' representations in the government texts by unsettling and disturbing the 'problem' to allow alternative premises to be imagined, considered, and proposed.

9.3 WPR Question 6(b):

How could the 'problem' representation be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?

The application of a Foucauldian conceptualisation of governmentality, and methods of problematisation, archaeology, and genealogy, through Bacchi's (2009) WPR framework, facilitated the examination of the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents. Within this framework, policy problematisations are understood to be produced through discourse and the power-knowledge nexus, emerging as normalised. This in turn generates an effect, as the norms in the discourse become co-opted, producing discursive subjects (Bacchi, 2009). Emphasising the discursive processes involved makes it possible to establish "space for challenge"; that is, it enables the truth status of a policy 'problem' to be questioned, and opens up space for the foundation of a policy to be contested and dismantled by alternative discourses (Bacchi, 2000, p. 55). In a similar fashion, Gale's (2006) understanding of policy analysis highlights the need to move beyond asking 'what is going on?' and 'how come?', to include the question, 'what can be done about it?'.

My application of the WPR framework identified three 'problem' representations emanating from an inflexible and unresponsive schooling system, characterised by hierarchical decision-making and onerous bureaucratic rules and regulations, along with issues associated with the uneven equity of outcomes. The fourth Labour Government's construction of educational matters requiring a policy response were positioned in sharp contrast with the nation's prolonged economic slowdown, thereby amplifying the need for change (Lange, 1999). While outwardly articulating that the proposed changes to the administration of education were for the benefit of New Zealand as a whole, the covert message was one that championed a market model of efficiency, individual responsibility, and competition. The implementation of the Tomorrow's Schools policy was accordingly undertaken through the narrative of common sense (e.g., would anyone dispute that all students should receive high-quality education that prepares them for their future?) (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988).

My study's objective was not to present an assessment of the Tomorrow's Schools policy. Rather, the goal was to subject the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents to multiple forms of problem-questioning in order to identify problematisations within the government texts, the assumptions and taken-for-granted knowledges they rely on, their genealogy, the issues they leave unproblematic, and their effects. Identifying 'problem' representations reveals the thinking behind the policy solution to the 'problem' and how the 'problem' is defined conceptually, thereby creating the "space for challenge" to either change or reimagine the 'problem' (Bacchi, 2000, p. 55).

In the following section, I consider the analysis presented throughout this thesis in order to coalesce two impactful contestations of the government's Tomorrow's Schools discourse. As stated, the overall aim of my study is to challenge thinking. Only when thinking is challenged, can the process of changing practices in the parent-school relationship begin, and therefore the 'doing' of policy be undertaken differently.

9.3.1 Challenging parental and community voice

In 1989, the Tomorrow's Schools policy document established a long-term agenda for education in New Zealand. Notwithstanding modifications made over the following three decades, Tomorrow's Schools has remained the bedrock of the country's approach to the governance, management, and administration of schooling. Consequently, several generations of parents and school staff have known no other model than Tomorrow's Schools. As emphasised by Humpage (2017), after 30 years, neoliberal-based values and practices have become a normalised and accepted part of the nation's schooling system.

In the government texts, the commitment to the Tomorrow's Schools paradigm is, in part, based on the principle that local communities should have a 'real voice' in their school. However, there is a mismatch in what the government texts propose and actual practices. Many educational partnerships, as discussed in the literature (see, for example, Goodall, 2018; Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017; Ngai & Koehn, 2016; Ravn, 2003; Vincent, 2017), purport to incorporate a collaborative, inclusive approach, with the needs of parents and the school paramount. It is this mode of operation that brings the partnership concept into conflict with the requirements of the neoliberal agenda for education (i.e., parents as autonomous citizens, making individualised choices).

While the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents frame the parent-school partnership as a shared effort towards a shared goal; at the same time, the documents delineate parents as customers or clients of schools. This understanding efficaciously contributes to moving the parent-school relationship away from partnership and towards a transactional, business-like interaction. Taylor (2001, p. 98) highlights this point, noting that in a school setting, the basic principles of partnership are delineated to a marginal role, with parents and community groups finding "that they do not determine the rules of play; that they do not have the resources to play on equal terms; that their right to play is frequently questioned; and that the cards are stacked in favour of more powerful players".

As originally envisioned, the school charter, as a three-way contract between the government, board of trustees, and the community, had the potential to play a key role as a modality for community voice. The Picot Report foregrounds that the charter of each school will "be approved nationally by the Minister, on the recommendation of the Ministry. It then becomes a contract between the State and the institution, and between the institution and its community" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 46). However, this possibility receded when amendments were made by the Charter Framework Implementation Group in May 1989. No longer classified as a contract, the charter became an agreement with two cosigners, the chairperson of the board of trustees and the Minister of Education. The third party, namely the community, was essentially omitted from the official partnership (Codd & Gordon, 1991).

A further modification to the school charter was made in the *Education Act 1989,* where the charter as an agreement between the Board and the Minister became an undertaking by the Board to the Minister. This version effectively devolves day-to-day administration to boards of trustees and consigns central control to the Minister of Education. With no direct access to the Minister, the community is reliant on the board of trustees channelling their responses. Dale and Ozga (1993) suggest that the exclusion of community was largely because of Treasury's alliance with principal-agent theory, which specifies that an agent (board of trustees) must work solely to one principal (the government). In Lange's (1999, p. 18) reflections on the implementation of the Tomorrow's Schools policy, he contends "the partnership between the government and the school and its community, which was the foundation of Tomorrow's Schools, has been conspicuously neglected".

Nonetheless, even if the community had retained statutory recognition, it is unlikely the community would be an effective voice. This is best explained via Hirschman's (1986, pp. 82–83) conception of voice, which affirms that the community is an example of horizontal ("the utterance and exchange of voices among citizens") rather than vertical voice ("actual communication addressed to the authorities by a citizen or an organisation representing a group of citizens"). According to McQueen (1991), one reason for recurrently referencing the voice of the community in Tomorrow's Schools, along with media-related promotional material, was because the community was considered to be an unstructured entity, with properties that would prevent it developing vertical voice (i.e., it was not the type of single-issue interest group that would exert pressure or agitate). Similarly, Lange (1999, p. 18) asserts, "Treasury calculated that Community Education Forums and Boards of Trustees were not going to be a significant force in future battles over education policy or resources".

One vertical voice that I contend could actively participate in parental and community representation is the professional body for school boards, the New Zealand School Boards Association (NZSBA)

(formerly the New Zealand School Trustees Association, NZSTA). From 1989, NZSBA, a membership-based national organisation, has represented the interests of its member school boards. Contingent on Ministry of Education funding, NZSBA's contractual agreement aligns its outcomes and activities with core Ministry priorities. Since 2013, the Ministry of Education has contracted NZSBA as the key provider of support, professional development, and guidance to all school boards, regardless of whether they are NZSBA members (Ministry of Education, 2017).

According to Bonne and Stevens (2017), 62 percent of New Zealand parents expect representation of parental voice through school board parent representatives, plus via their School Boards Association. However, NZSBA maintains that it "does not directly represent parents", affirming that its focus is governing rather than representing (NZSTA, 2015, p. 1). Consequently, NZSBA appraises how to improve the efficacy of the schooling system rather than being a voice to change it. The opportunity for parents to cohesively contribute to shaping the parent-school connection through vertical voice is therefore unrealised through NZSBA.

Historically operating on the sidelines in subsidiary positions (Barrington, 1990), parents are repositioned in the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents as integral to decision-making at the local level. The rhetoric of restructuring underlines the notion that decentralisation enhances local control over the schooling system in a way that is more responsive to community needs. As the Picot Report emphasises, "parents and community groups should be able to … participate in decision-making, and to influence the system …" (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988, p. 41). This is consistent with Treasury's predisposition to reducing bureaucratic power, ostensibly limiting the role of the state, and moving decisions as close as possible to those most affected by them (The Treasury, 1987b).

This theme is expanded in the Ministry of Education's information booklet on community forums, with the preface establishing that the forums will "bring the whole community even more closely into the decision-making process … the end result will reflect the Government's vision of education being more responsive to the needs of the community" (Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 1). Confirming the purpose of the forums as a means of participation for the community, Mansell (1993) highlights the goal is for issues to be debated and then fed into the Ministry of Education, thereby laying the groundwork for grassroots ideas to play a foundational role in the decision-making mechanism. As the Minister of Education (1988, p. 2) clarifies, "community education forums will be set up to act as a place of debate and a voice for all those who wish to air their concerns". To this end, the Minister of Education issued a media statement about community forums, noting that:

> Forum convenors will be responsible for making sure that all voices in the community are heard … this will include minority groups and so will ensure the continued input of ideas from all sectors into education issues … they will discuss local and also nationwide issues. … Tomorrow's Schools envisages a power-sharing. … between parents, education, and the government. Which is how it should be if this country is to face the next century with any confidence.
> (Office of the Minister of Education, 1989)

With the disestablishment of the Parent Advocacy Council and Community Education Forums in 1991, the board of trustees model became the default setting for parental and community participation in school decision-making processes. However, limitations on trustee numbers, and the challenges of representativeness, suggest that school boards may not necessarily offer a comprehensive form of participation in decision-making. Such issues were noted in the 2013 Parliamentary Education and Science Select Committee's Inquiry into engaging parents in the education of their children. For example, concerns were expressed about the five parent positions on a school board being appropriately representative of the community, with the voting process (first past the post) seen to be impacting on board diversity (Calder, 2014). Codd and Gordon (1991, pp. 32–33) conjectured that, "despite all the rhetoric about 'partnership' and the blatant propaganda about the empowerment of communities", school boards of trustees can never be "free to contest State action".

Surprisingly, in a New Zealand document, transcribed on page two of the Tomorrow's Schools policy text is a quotation attributed to the third President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson. This quote is reproduced in full, in both English and te reo Māori (the Māori language), with the exception of the last two words, which are omitted from the Tomorrow's Schools document (refer brackets below).

> I know of no safe depository of the ultimate power of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion [by education].
> (Thomas Jefferson, 1820, cited in Minister of Education, 1988, p. ii)

The two words ('by education') overlooked in the Thomas Jefferson quote are important. To encourage collaborative dialogue, the focus needs to be on understanding how the system works in order to change it. Therefore, a basic prerequisite is to educate and build capacity, individually and collectively, to identify, reveal, and challenge taken-for-granted discourses that manifest as truth in the schooling system. As the New Zealand School Trustees Association's submission to the 2013 Parliamentary Education and Science Select Committee Inquiry notes:

> There has been a lack of effective dialogue with the wider community at a national level about what is happening in our schools … This is not because nobody cares, but because creating a national dialogue with the New Zealand public at large – our collective 'local community' – is a task that requires more than just the isolated efforts of a school here and there, or even an organisation such as our own. It requires a collaborative and coherent effort from government and the sector as a whole.
> (New Zealand School Trustees Association, 2013, p. 4)

An alternative to the dominant discourse would begin by acknowledging that authentic democratic participation requires the mobilisation and influence of everyone who wants to be involved in such a process. Specifically, people need to be able to define for themselves the nature of the issues they face, or what Bessant (2002, p. 16) designates as "the power to say how things are". To this end, a participatory process includes the ability to facilitate information sharing about government policy and the benefits of different courses of action. Until there is pressure from below (i.e., the community as a whole becomes more vociferous of participation), the likelihood of collaborative and participatory decision-making practices remain minimal. To describe the type of action required to achieve such participation, Cavanagh et al. (1991, p. 153) use the term "a revolution in society" for engaging in a form of resistance that Foucault (1978, p. 201) discusses as "counter-conduct", or a "struggle against the procedures implemented for conducting others".

Questioning or diminishing a dominant discourse aligned to power (e.g., neoliberal-influenced practices in education) and presenting a competing discourse are functions of resistance. Foucault's (1982, p. 225) narration on resistance underscores that when there are two contrasting discourses, the two forces contesting opposing interests will employ a "strategy of struggle". Such an approach entails engaging in defiance, having "antagonistic reactions" to phenomena, and strategically generating and manipulating actions (Foucault, 1982, p. 225). This form of confrontation is used by both forces in a continuous process to influence actions, while fending off the opposition. For example, in the struggle between the discourse of competition and the discourse of collaboration, both endeavour to weaken the knowledge the other is advancing as truth.

Accordingly, each time a question is raised or an alternative viewpoint is expressed by an individual or group who chooses to resist, there is potential for an expansion in thinking and opening up of discourse to new possibilities. In operating at an everyday or micro level, Foucault (1977) contends resistance uncovers and challenges social norms, thereby generating opportunities for an alternative conception that challenges the dominant understanding being advanced as truth. In rehabilitating voices that have been relinquished or excluded, resistance reinstates subject positions that power has sought to

restrict. Consequently, consistent with Weedon (1997, p. 108), resistance at a grassroots level is a starting point in the development of different types of knowledge, or, where such alternatives already exist, of "winning individuals over to these discourses" and creating the possibility of transformation.

9.3.2 Challenging policy and managerialism

The influence of neoliberalism on education reform agendas around the world, including New Zealand's, prompted Ball (1994) to compare this proliferation to a policy epidemic. The movement towards evidence-based education policy and practice, or the 'what works' approach, grew in New Zealand as education developed into a function of economic production, with importance attached to the construction of human capital and returns on knowledge, skills, and income (e.g., educational qualifications) (Lupton & Hayes, 2021). As a consequence, the policymaker initiates a technical exercise of rationally selecting the best approach based on empirical data. It is assumed that evidence, acknowledged as value-free and context-neutral, will provide the answer to most, if not all, policy questions. For this purpose, the Ministry of Education's webpage, *Education Counts,* brings together a range of resources to inform the use of evidence in policy.

The schooling system prior to Tomorrow's Schools had issues. As the Picot Report establishes, many parents concerned about the performance of their local school were unable to pin down anyone in the 'system' who could, or would, take responsibility for it (Taskforce to Review Education Administration, 1988). It is therefore naive to think about returning to some 'rose-tinted', eminently better yesteryear. As confronting the totality of neoliberalism in education is likely to be a futile exercise due to its entrenchment, particular consideration needs to be given to modulating certain tenets underpinning Tomorrow's Schools. For instance, school choice represents an effective act of power if the choices made available to all parents are equal. Enabling parents and schools to develop multifarious approaches to support diverse learning needs has the potential to allow for growth in innovation. However, the facilitation of choice should not control the schooling system (e.g., individually competing schools). In the same vein, the autonomous school archetype could function in a very different way if it was grounded in a social justice and equity framework, rather than a market model of economic efficiency, competition, and accountability.

If the schooling system in New Zealand is to be equitable, policy tweaks are inadequate. For example, responding to the 2019 Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce's recommendations, the sixth Labour Government agreed that Tomorrow's Schools had yielded positive results for some students, but not for others (Adamson, 2022). While the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce (2018, p.

11) advised that “tinkering with the existing system simply will not work”, the government’s response was focused on readjusting the system through the implementation of a range of support measures (e.g., the establishment of an Education Service Agency within the Ministry of Education to assist schools at the regional level) (Ministry of Education, 2019). Following the release of the government’s report (*Supporting all schools to succeed: Reform of the Tomorrow’s Schools system*), the Minister of Education clarified that it was “not about more centralised decision-making or smothering schools that already perform well”; rather, it was about “making pragmatic and workable improvements that … can gain broad support” (Hipkins, 2019). Specifically, the government stated that Tomorrow’s Schools was not to be scrapped, but improved. For Adamson (2022, p. 569) this infers that “the current system will be fine, if only we can explain it better, resource it better, and talk to each other more often”. Undoubtedly, while the schooling system remains based on an underlying rationale that is flawed (e.g., a neoliberal managerialist model of education), it is indisputable that small efforts of correction and improvement can only achieve so much.

Moreover, developing and sustaining a coherent long-term programme of change cannot depend on a three-year tenure of government, as exemplified in New Zealand, with Ministers who are often reactive to the country’s international educational performance rankings (particularly the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures reading, mathematics, and scientific literacy) and are dependent on the advice of ‘expert’ consultants. On moving from the academic to the political field, Gordon (1999) made the following salient observation:

> … how little policy planning actually takes place, and how ephemeral such plans are, exposed to the whims of ministers. There is no blueprint being carried out and no automatic unfolding … Policies are being reinvented constantly. Often politicians appear to be confused about the implications of their policy actions – Not blueprint, then, but mantra. (p. 249)

A quarter of a century later, this statement remains relevant. As Lupton & Hayes (2021, p. 8) note, the “policy juggernaut rolls along”, largely on the same trajectory. In this way, the neoliberal policy regime produces its own body of knowledge, in a circular route that does not allow other knowledges to enter the policy debate. It is of relevance, therefore, that during a 2017 Radio New Zealand interview, the fourth National Government’s Prime Minister (1990-1997), Jim Bolger, retrospectively acknowledged that neoliberal policies had unequivocally failed New Zealand, noting that what economic growth there was went to the few at the top (Espiner, 2017). Lamenting the levels of inequality and the ever-widening wealth gap, Bolger asserted that the model needed to change (Espiner, 2017).

There are some clear and practical points where change could commence. The first would be to establish mechanisms to advance the use of a broader range of knowledge and methodological approaches in policymaking. Based on my study, it may be possible to explore ways for change that are not currently evident by unpacking the values and assumptions underpinning the policy process, validating how a 'problem' is constructed and represented, and determining what is left unquestioned when a 'problem' is conceptualised in a particular way.

Above all, if the forms of knowledge privileged over others are not identified, then any significant rethinking of policy will only stay at a perfunctory level. In this way, a key issue is the current disparity between academic research and policy, with research selectively developed and used by the government, rather than research itself impacting on the substance and direction of policy in any consequential, equitable way. As a result, in practice, politics and ideology are the drivers of policy. Consequently, I argue there needs to be collaboration between researchers, policymakers, the education sector, parents, and the community, working together to inform government decision-making.

In conjunction with acknowledging the wide-ranging effects of neoliberalism, the relationship between economic and social policy needs to be substantively examined. New ways of thinking are required in order to test the essentially neoliberalist ideological assumptions underpinning the current paradigm of thought that has come to dominate policymaking. Bacchi's (2000, p. 55) "reluctant optimism" evokes the possibility of new discursive spaces, thereby exerting influence on, not the way things are, but the way they are imagined. To progress this change, I draw on observations made by the fourth Labour Government's Prime Minister and Minister of Education, David Lange, a decade after the implementation of the Tomorrow's Schools policy:

> We've given away equality of opportunity in schooling for the shyster democracy of the marketplace. We've asked teachers and trustees to carry on while the government turned its back on the partnership which was at the heart of Tomorrow's Schools. … None of what happened was inevitable. What happened is a product of political choice, and it can be undone if there is the political will to undo it. If there is a firm political commitment to remove the competitive element from school management, then it can be removed. … The critical issue is surely the choice between a competitive model of school management and a collaborative model, or, as politicians would probably put it, between freedom of choice and equality of opportunity. The rest is detail to be settled in light of the greater goal.
>
> (Lange, 1999, p. 20)

9.4 Self-problematisation: Positioning myself within the study

Bacchi (2009) uses the concept of self-problematisation as a task for the researcher to subject their own values, assumptions, and political rationales to the WPR process. With importance placed on generating a critical consciousness, Bacchi (2011) separates self-problematisation from reflexivity. For Bacchi (2011), reflexivity involves a researcher standing back from their beliefs to provide an objective understanding of issues. In comparison to reflexivity, self-problematisation requires the researcher to actively engage with their positioning, rather than standing back. In describing this step, Bacchi and Goodwin (2016, p. 24) refer to Foucault's encouragement to problematise "even what we are ourselves".

Bringing issues of positioning to the foreground therefore becomes a commitment to work on what Bacchi (2018, p. 10) refers to as the "practice of the self". Accordingly, I recognise that what I was able to determine from the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents was filtered by the conceptual framework I employed, but also my own personal and professional background and views. Self-problematisation proved to be a demanding component of Bacchi's (2009) approach, with this particular step seldom detailed comprehensively in published studies employing the WPR model. At the Karlstad University-hosted WPR symposium on critical policy studies, Bacchi (2022) acknowledged that researchers tend to leave the self-problematisation step out. Based on my experience, I submit that if you are rigorously engaging with WPR, then you inevitably become involved in questioning your own premises.

Seeking meaning within my study assisted in clarifying how I am as equally embedded within specific discourses as others (e.g., placing unconditional belief in the production of measurable evidence). Through the practice of self-problematisation, I examined how my understanding has been leveraged by the overarching phenomena, knowledges, and discourses that I am, and have been, a part of. This was critical in helping me to consider how I may be, as Bacchi (2011, p. 36) points out, inadvertently "complicit in oppressive modes of governing".

One challenge, for example, was catching myself in the act of foreshadowing certain impacts in relation to my study's identified problematisations, based on their origins (e.g., the influence and actions of Treasury and the State Services Commission). The practice of active self-problematisation built into the WPR approach helped me to more judiciously interact with my own tendencies towards assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of thinking, together with the silences in my own narrative.

Over the last 35 years I have worked in several government departments. Commencing in a junior position, my career eventually led to a role in the executive office of the Treasury. I arrived during the transition from the second term of the fourth Labour Government and the first term of the fourth National Government. With my workstation situated on the sparsely occupied twelfth floor, with its large wooden-panelled rooms, I found myself on occasion pondering what conversations might have occurred in these rooms during the 1980s. Following five years at No. 1 The Terrace (Treasury), I crossed the road to No. 2 The Terrace (Reserve Bank) for a further five years. It would be fair to say that over this 10 year period, I was comprehensively immersed in a neoliberal economic environment.

My thinking began to shift, however, following the completion of Massey University undergraduate paper 87.203 (Sociology of Education), coordinated by Professor Roy Nash. From this module, I developed an interest in Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of social and cultural capital, and Foucault's (1991a) deliberations on how society divides and promotes people by categories, and how power operates between individuals and institutions.

When it came time to make a move to my principal interest, education, it was an arduous process. Submitting numerous job application documents, I became a regular at the Ministry of Education's reception desk. Eventually a manager observed that my CV 'looked kind of interesting' and I was appointed to a senior advisory role. In my mind, I envisioned the Ministry would have an extensive resource centre to peruse the most up-to-date pedagogical information, along with an active speaker/seminar programme on educational topics (similar to Treasury's programme on economic issues). Unfortunately, this was not the case. In reality, there was a distinct lack of opportunity at the Ministry of Education for shared debate and discussion on any topic.

As my dissertation progressed, I began to feel unease in my Ministry of Education role. In discussions with colleagues at work, I attempted to contest the sanctioned governmental response to most issues within the schooling system (e.g., individual (parental, school board) responsibility). In experiencing pushback to my probing, I found my former ingenuous engagement with government approaches and concepts were unveiled, resulting in the critical scrutinisation of my own thinking and the manner in which it had been influenced and shaped by what Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) designate as geographic, historic, and cultural contexts.

Predicated on a Foucauldian view of government as a relationship between truth, power, and the self, Ball (2016, p. 1142) references the impact of rejecting neoliberal subjectivity in a work context, when "established and perhaps cherished professional skills and judgements are made unreliable". Confronting the influence neoliberalism had in shaping my monological thinking was an initial hurdle. In acknowledging that I had allowed my membership in a hegemonically normative discourse to do

much of my thinking for me, I recognised how natural it was, even momentarily, to be pulled into viewing rhetoric (e.g., choice, competition, responsibility) as logical and 'correct'. For that reason, I initially found it difficult to break down and examine my own response to dominant neoliberal discourse. Accordingly, my experience is reminiscent of Cooke and Kothari's (2001, p. 15) description of self-problematisation as involving an "ethics of discomfort".

9.5 Reviewing the study

This thesis had two overarching objectives. First, to provide a worked example of Bacchi's (2009) WPR model in the field of education, focusing primarily on the solutions advanced in the government-appointed Picot Taskforce's 1988 ancillary report (*Administering for excellence*) and the government's 1988 policy response document (*Tomorrow's Schools*). The second objective was to comprehensively assess the WPR framework and its ability to recognise, challenge, and disrupt normative discourses, specifically in relation to the parent-school connection.

The study's broad-based question '*What is the 'problem' represented to be in the New Zealand Tomorrow's Schools education reform policy?*' provided an entry point for examining the 'problems' and proposed solutions within the government texts. Further investigation was facilitated by way of four sub-questions, developed on the basis of Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach. Attributable to its post-structuralist underpinnings, Bacchi's (2009) methodological framework provided space for, and actively participated in, disrupting and challenging the assumptions, origins, silences, and effects of the Tomorrow's Schools policy (i.e., interrupting its logic), thereby enabling other ways of conceptualising the problematisations.

The analysis of educational policies often functions as an implicit and, at times, unquestioned epistemological foundation that profoundly impacts routine pedagogical practices and overarching strategic directions within educational institutions and systems. As evidenced by my research findings, a rigorous and comprehensive examination of policy documents is indispensable for a thorough understanding of educational practices and their policy underpinnings. Bacchi's (2009) six-question framework provides a structured and methodical approach for the critical analysis of educational policy documents. A notable strength of the WPR model lies in its iterative evolution and refinement over the last two decades, reflecting continuous engagement with theoretical advancements and practical application. Bacchi (2022) emphasises this dynamic nature, describing the framework as an ongoing and perpetually evolving 'work in progress'.

Notwithstanding Bacchi's (2009) advocacy for either a systematic or integrated application of the six WPR guiding questions, the inherent interconnectedness within the methodology necessitated, for my research, a sequential analytical strategy. This deliberate approach facilitated a rigorous examination, allowing each question to illuminate the potential for divergent understandings of the Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents, contingent upon the specific analytical lens applied by each individual WPR question. While this sequential application of the WPR framework proved effective for the in-depth analytical demands of this dissertation, it is imperative for future researchers contemplating the adoption of Bacchi's (2009) WPR framework to exercise contextual sensitivity. Researchers must recognise that the methodological efficacy of the WPR model, like any research approach, is not absolute but highly context-dependent. Its suitability, and the resultant insights it yields, may vary considerably across different research settings and temporal frames. Therefore, researchers should carefully consider the specific aims of their inquiry and the unique characteristics of their research context when determining the most appropriate implementation of the WPR framework.

9.5.1 Methodological considerations and contributions

During my expansive reading on policy-as-discourse methods, I identified Bacchi's (2009) 'What is the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) framework. Looking back on my initial notations on methodologies, I found that I had underlined WPR and tagged it with a positive YES!. Disillusioned with the dominant work programme used in my government analyst position, where a 'problem' is solved based on evidence gathered by a subject matter expert, under the rubric of 'what works', I was initially drawn to the simplicity of Bacchi's (2009) perspective. In particular, the WPR model provides a straightforward structure, or script, to examine the relationship between discourse and other factors (e.g., ideology, power, norms, values, institutions, inequality). Although an often challenging exercise, using WPR as a questioning, probing, and problematising way of thinking enabled the interrogation of meaning in the study's government texts.

Focusing primarily on the solutions advanced in the government-appointed Picot Taskforce's 1988 ancillary report, *Administering for excellence: Effective administration in education* (the Picot Report), and the government's 1988 policy response document, *Tomorrow's Schools: The reform of education administration in New Zealand*, I applied Bacchi's (2009) question prompts as lenses to understand how the 'problems' were presented and characterised in these documents (i.e., as inevitable truths). The purpose of the study was not to evaluate the policy, nor to judge its effectiveness. This should not be interpreted as meaning other types of analysis are not advantageous; on the contrary, as noted in

Chapter 1, a considerable body of existing evaluative literature on Tomorrow's Schools provides numerous important insights.

As this thesis has made clear, when a proposal circulates within a population for a period of time, its truth claim becomes inherent, consequently emerging as normalised. Bacchi's (2009) methodological framework specifically steps back from what appears common sense and asks how it has come to be. By arguing that the examination of a problematisation serves to disrupt taken-for-granted truths so as to focus attention on the "strategic relations – the politics – that shape lives", Bacchi (2012, p. 1) points out that analysing policy is a political act. In essence, this is the basis of Bacchi's (2009) methodology. Attention is accordingly directed to a framework that explicates the purpose, power, and politics involved in policy.

Establishing how a 'problem' is constructed and represented (or problematised) enables an examination of the discourse on which the problematisation relies. This in turn provides an understanding of the impacts of framing a 'problem' in a certain way, including what is left unproblematic and whether the 'problem' could be framed in a different way (Bacchi, 2009). Therefore, rather than assuming that policy represents manifest steps towards an intended goal, WPR draws attention to the conditions that enable specific ways of thinking to become established from the outset. This is coupled with considering other trajectories that could have been taken but were not. As a result, the WPR approach becomes an integral way of thinking in everyday life. By way of example, when I am reading a newspaper or watching television, it is now difficult to not think about how a 'problem' could be unravelled and understood differently. In this regard, my study has emphasised the need for space, which makes it possible to step back and challenge dominant narratives and ways of thinking within policy.

Bacchi's (2009) Foucauldian-influenced post-structuralist position conceptualises policy as a governing technology that constructs what needs to change. This model sits in direct contrast to the contemporary evidence-based policy domain, which relies on an analogous principle of knowledge. That is, it accepts the positivist-oriented approach that assumes knowledge is neutral, ignoring the connections between knowledge and power. Davies et al. (2000, p. 369) advocates that, while not a specific method, evidence-based policy puts the "best available evidence from research at the heart of policy development and implementation". Congruent with this approach, it is suggested that different policy options can be tested in the same manner as a scientific experiment to see what works best (e.g., has the best outcomes). From my experience, the evaluative and rational stance of evidence-based policy can lead to the concept being used as a slogan by government departments (i.e., to support policy positions, based on narrow conceptions of what constitutes evidence, the often repeated mantra of 'it's supported by evidence' is used). Accordingly, the evidence-based method of

problem-solving is presented as a form of common sense; as if 'problems' are self-evident, a position contested by my study.

Throughout my research, I strived to remain aware of the specificity of my own perspective. As outlined in Section 9.3 (researcher positioning), I came to my study with assumptions about the schooling system and education, informed by my own experiences and insights. While this, as such, is not a limitation, it does need to be reiterated that my positioning allowed me to make choices about particular issues and to look at them in certain ways. For instance, had the issue of neoliberal subjectivities in education been examined by someone from a different background (e.g., class, ethnicity, work experience), they may have done so in another way. Therefore, my positionality constructed the thesis in a specific manner, which also determined its boundaries.

This study has demonstrated the applicability of post-structuralism, and particularly the use of Bacchi's (2009) WPR model, as an alternative method of examining policy, providing insight into how taken-for-granted truths are developed and how solutions are validated. As such, it contributes another methodological tool to a cache not based on a positivist approach. Notably, it challenges what Bullough (2012, p. 344) refers to as the "seductive pursuit of what we now call 'best practice'; namely, single, best solutions, to complex problems".

9.5.2 Final reflections and future directions

My study had as its starting point a specific discomfiture about practices in the parent-school partnership paradigm. This unease was compounded by the Secretary for Education's call for 'meaningful, powerful education connections between whānau and schools' as a contemporary, innovative practice for resolving ongoing issues (I. Holsted, Ministry of Education, personal communication, April 4, 2024).

Another determining factor was the identification of Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach for interrogating government policy that has circumvented attention largely because it has relied for so long on taken-for-granted assumptions. This determinant is succinctly expressed in Foucault's (1988a, p. 154) observation that "on what assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought, the practices we accept rest". Now that I have reached the end of this thesis, I pause at this juncture to consider what the study has taught me and what is required in terms of future work.

Internationally, researchers stress the importance of examining parental interactions with schools that move past traditional asymmetrical power relations (Auerbach, 2011; Goodall, 2018, 2021; Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017). This point was amplified during the global COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2020), adding to the merit of the research topic moving forward. In particular, the pandemic underlined that learning is affected not only by student efforts or school effects, but also by parental engagement, which in turn is shaped by parents with the requisite capital (social, cultural, economic) (Antony-Newman, 2020, 2023).

Relationships between parents and schools are not a given; nor is there only one possible parent-school connection model. As researchers suggest, inclusive or disconnected relationships between parents and schools; good, bad, or non-existent communication channels; and the integration or exclusion of parents in decision-making processes, can have significant effects on, for instance, children's wellbeing and future trajectories, academic results, and absenteeism rates (see, for example, Beneyto et al., 2019; Castro et al., 2015; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Ishimaru, 2013; Van Voorhis et al., 2013). The parent-school relationship is therefore not an outlying feature of education policy.

Commensurate with Dusi's (2012) assertion that the shape and nature of parent-school interactions present an image of an unresolved issue, signifying the need for further research, my thesis adds to a corpus of international studies on the role of partnerships within education (refer Burtonshaw, 2022; Cardini, 2006; Gorman & Furlong, 2023; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Nailer, 2022).

The Picot Report and Tomorrow's Schools documents advocated that stripping away onerous aspects of bureaucratic control would allow schools and their communities to be more flexible and responsive, thereby enabling better educational decisions to be made closer to the point of learning. Aligning with this belief, a robust discursive shift ensued, incorporating parents into a self-managing schooling model through the parent-school partnership. In illuminating the vague depiction of partnership within the Tomorrow's Schools framework, this study underscored that the "empty signifier" status of partnerships, as argued by Burgos (2003, p. 55), is manifested in New Zealand schools.

Targeting the restructuring of administration in the schooling system, Tomorrow's Schools encouraged parents to behave entrepreneurially in a competitive education market, relatively free from constraints on personal autonomy and choice. However, the school choice paradigm fails to recognise that markets are not instruments of participatory decision-making because they are focused on distributing services based on customer demand or consumer purchasing power. As Lange (1999, p. 18) notes, "if you have self-managing schools there is inevitably a risk that the entrepreneurial or profit-seeking side of our culture will assert itself over concepts of fairness and social responsibility".

Evolving from social, economic, and cultural factors, as this thesis discussed, the Tomorrow's Schools reforms subsequently resulted in concentrating disadvantaged students in disadvantaged schools, producing a recurrent cycle of inequality. In consonance with Windle (2014, p. 320), the promise of choice means that the issue of student differentiation is not remedied, despite this construct representing "one of the most powerful levers to reducing inequality".

On a global scale, as part of its overarching '7+1' strategic framework for innovating education in the 21st century, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2017, p. 44) positions parents, "not as passive supporters of schools, but as active partners in the educational process". In this context, together with research literature on educational partnerships in general, issues of power are absent or under-considered. I argue that drawing on a Foucauldian understanding of power provides room to consider partnerships over and above hierarchies of knowledge and expertise; instead, considering how power circulates as a regime of truth.

Between the discursive emphasis on parental and community participation and how practices and decisions are actually organised within partnerships, there is ambiguity concerning parental involvement in schools. At a policy level, this reveals that assumptions have been made that the parental involvement concept is well understood, notwithstanding the disparate ways parents are positioned in their children's schooling. As Klees (2001, p. 116) reminds, the concept of partnership should not be based on a fairytale "let's all do this together" discourse as a way of transforming unequal relations into mutual partnerships. Therefore, parent-school partnership models must recognise the issue of power and establish collaborative relationships in which the consequences of unequal power relations are discussable and transformable.

An effective way of thinking about the parent-school connection is to visualise dropping a pebble into a pond. The ripples produced by the pebble extend outward with wider and wider effects. Awareness of a new way of thinking and connecting, in relation to the parent-school partnership model, works similarly to the pebble dropping into the water, with the ripples representing the experiences of disturbance and transformation. To counteract a dominant discourse, alternative interpretations and possibilities need to be advanced, thereby opening up space for disruption, and creating the potential for transformation (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). For instance, when attention is directed at the neoliberal-influenced practices in Tomorrow's Schools, the deleterious effects of inequitable student outcomes are underscored. In so doing, the general lack of awareness of the situation (e.g., a more segregated, more unequal schooling system) is revealed and interest in change is stimulated. Foucault (1981, cited in Koopman, 2013, p. 16) advances that "as soon as people begin to have trouble thinking things the way they have been thought, transformation becomes at the same time very urgent, very difficult, and entirely possible".

The way that policy frames discourse shapes what can be thought of as possible (Bacchi, 2009). To achieve this requires different ways of thinking, acting, and reacting. For example, if parental and community engagement is represented as a means to an end, with the end being students seen primarily as commodities for the labour market, other rationales for involvement become immaterial and implausible. Moving forward, I contend that instead of emblematically acknowledging parents as partners, parents rather than schools need to be positioned at the centre of policies progressing parent-school initiatives. From this perspective, a research focus on how parents and schools move towards an authentic and productive framework to work together on decision-making, and what constitutes an appropriate connection between parents and schools, is imperative. As Lange (1999, p. 21) reminds, the participation of parents was "the keystone of Tomorrow's Schools. We have not fully tapped that resource and I believe that we should".

By way of conclusion, it is appropriate to recall that the Taskforce to Review Education Administration (1988) advised that tinkering with the schooling system would not be sufficient to accomplish the improvements required. Thirty years later, the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce (2018) reinforced this point, cautioning that tinkering with the existing system would not work. This study has shown that the governmentalities of the educational policy context are oriented towards a ubiquitous drive for economic growth, and that what is sayable about education is contingent on those terms. To say or do differently requires the web-like mechanisms that govern the policy landscape to be disrupted and challenged. That is, if today's parents are to be active participants in the parent-school relationship, change, not tinkering with the fine-tuning, is needed.

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Appendix A

Quick reference guide to the objectives of the WPR question prompts

Quick Reference Guide What is the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) Questions		
Question		**Objective**
1.	What is the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy?	To identify the implied 'problem' representation in the policy document.
2.	What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?	To identify and analyse the conceptual logics that underpin problematisations (i.e., meanings that must be in place for a 'problem' representation to 'stick' or to make sense).
3.	How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?	To highlight the conditions that allow a particular 'problem' representation to take shape and to assume dominance.
4.	What is left unproblematic in this 'problem' representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?	To reflect on and consider issues and perspectives overlooked or silenced.
5.	What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?	To identify the effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) of specific 'problem' representations so that they can be critically assessed.
6.	How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated, and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced?	To pay attention both to the means through which some problematisations become dominant, and to the possibility of challenging 'problem' representations that are judged to be harmful.