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Editorial

Welcome to Issue 9 of **Spark**.

Welcome to Issue 9 of SPARK. In this issue, we bring together a selection of pieces about policy and curriculum, including creativity in education through the use of puppets. The pieces are written by Early Years students from levels 4, 5 and 6 of the Education and Early Childhood Studies Programmes. The work has been kept as close as possible to the original work, to keep the individual writing styles of the students' pieces. We hope you find this edition interesting and welcome feedback. If this issue of SPARK has inspired you to submit your own work to be published or if you have any queries, please feel free to contact us at SPARK@ljmu.ac.uk

Laura Clancy, Catherine McNeill, Kirstie Mitchell, Fahima Saeed
Student editors

This year has been a learning curve for staff and student editors as we move to an online submission process. Many thanks to the library services for support in publishing Spark as an open source online journal. It can be found at http://openjournals.ljmu.ac.uk/spark . We also thank our outgoing student editor, Laura Clancy, who graduates this year for her input into Spark. Please let us know what you think of this issue of Spark!

Staff editors

Jessica Robinson

Education Studies and Early Years student

A critical discussion of curriculum delivery, OFSTED grading and effective primary teaching.

This paper will discuss effective pedagogy, including considerations of the government's expectations of teachers and teaching. Throughout this assignment key documents will be discussed, compared and contrasted, whilst exploring international ideas and practice.

According to Skinner (2010) 'pedagogy' and 'pedagogue' are terms commonly used around the ideology of educational debate and policy, in order to influence practice. Skinner (2010) argues that pedagogy could also be described as a term for methods of teaching or approaches. However, Alexander (2009) would argue that it is more than that, and that the word pedagogy is a word that has been taken for granted in many countries, but in England it goes almost unheard of. Alexander (2009) argues that pedagogy is not just the methods of teaching, but it's the "what, how and why" of teaching, influencing teachers to question their practice in order to deliver their lessons to a high standard, and to inspire children to want to learn and further their knowledge (Alexander, 2009 p28). Moreover, Alexander (2009) argues that the government in England 'dictate' what is taught in classrooms and there is no room for teachers to have professional freedom in what they teach, to enable to fit their lessons according to the individuals they are teaching. In contrast, in countries like Finland, this is not the case. According to Lopez (2012) Finnish head teachers and teachers have freedom and independence when delivering the curriculum, and the Finnish curriculum is far less academic than the curriculum in England. Lopez (2012) also suggests that Finland is the only country in the developed world, where pupils attend the least number of hours per week, but still get better grades in the long term. Thus, in Finland, children do not partake in compulsory exams until they are aged seventeen to nineteen, and although the children's

progress is still monitored, this is done in a formative manner, with no results being compared, graded or scored (Lopez, 2012).

Sir Jim Rose recognised the importance of pedagogy, and in 2008 when the Labour Government were in power, Rose introduced a curriculum reform for primary schools in England (DCSF, 2009). The aim of this review was to 'make it easier for teachers', giving them the freedom to teach in ways according to their own judgements (Bartlett and Burton, 2012). This review was to capture the importance of the primary phase, recognising the importance of development throughout childhood, and gave primary school teachers a pathway to inspire children's learning (DCSF, 2009). Throughout the Rose review (DCSF, 2009), Jim Rose identifies the importance of the curriculum being based on the whole child, and suggests that the curriculum should be suited to children's development to enrich their learning experiences and individual needs. Furthermore, Rose (DCSF, 2009) also highlights the importance of areas of development throughout this report, and illustrates that a carefully designed curriculum can enable children to learn "physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially, culturally, morally and spiritually" (DCSF, 2009 p9). To consider these areas in a government proposal is absolutely critical, as it demonstrates the understanding of child development, and the theory behind the practice. Theorists such as Piaget (1962), Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1986) also advocate these areas for learning and development (Gray and MacBlain, 2012). This proves that when writing his review, Rose has considered a child centred approach, with pedagogy and theories of learning at the very heart of it.

According to Gray and MacBlain (2012) Jean Piaget advocated that children learn in ages and stages, and learn through cognitive development. Piaget identified that children needed to be active learners and learn through discovering things for themselves. This is an essential part of learning, as it could be argued that children in the UK, are not 'finding themselves' or having enough time before they

start school to truly find what they like doing or what they are interested in (Coughlan, 2008). Coughlan (2008) also argues that while children as young as four are starting school in England and "ploughing through a fixed curriculum", children in countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland are still "ploughing up the kindergarten sandpit" (Coughlan, 2008 p1).

This shows that on a global scale, countries around the world are recognising the importance of play in the early stages of a child's life, and how teachers can further a child's knowledge through play, yet England fail to recognise this, and still send British children to school at the age of four, when other countries such as Sweden, Denmark or Finland, are sending their children to school at age seven. Lopez (2012) argues the children from such countries are higher achievers than those in England.

It could be suggested, that the government in England need to introduce an approach that is completely child centred, as a later school starting age will have a positive impact on the economy long term. However, Sharp (2002) argues that an early start in education, benefits children from disadvantaged backgrounds in England, in order to further their academic skills, and some parents would rather send their children to school earlier, to enable them to go to work (Sharp, 2002). Sharp (2002) also argues, that the school starting age in England, has been the same since the 1870 Education Act and this was put in place at these times to save children from exploitation, and from unhealthy conditions on the streets. This also meant that historically, children could start school earlier with the intentions of leaving school earlier, so that they could go to work. However, currently, this is not the case as children have to stay in education until the age of eighteen in England (Gov.uk, 2015). Furthermore, Ellyat (2013) argues that an early school starting age could potentially damage a child's learning for life, and suggests that an early school

starting age can damage a child's well-being and attainment. Ellyat (2013) identifies that children need an environment rich in creativity, and play, in order to develop happily and healthily. This evidence shows that there are wider issues that would constitute towards being an effective teacher. Simply being graded as outstanding by Ofsted only fulfils specific target areas defined by Ofsted. These target areas do not consider children's individual strengths and a 'one size fits all' approach does not work, as children learn in a variety of different ways. Weale (2016) agrees with this and suggests that Ofsted need a more 'inclusive approach' to education.

In 2010, when the coalition government came into power, they released a White Paper called 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010). A 'White Paper' is completed when the government release proposed future legislation for the country. This document called for "radical reform" (DfE, 2010 pg.4) within the education system in England, in terms of how teaching is delivered to children. The purpose of its release, was that the government recognised that the education system in England had flaws and the aim of the white paper was to change the way teachers delivered their teaching. The document highlights change for the following areas; teaching and leadership, pupil behaviour, curriculum, assessment and qualifications, school control, accountability, school improvement and school funding. However, Waterman (2010) suggests that this paper has been the most radical reform since the Education Reform Act of 1988, and that the white paper is very old fashioned with a "1960's feel" to it (Waterman, 2010 pg.10). However, Garratt and Forrester (2012) would argue that education policy is ever changing, and that the many different factors of education depend on the different levels of prominence. Fullan (1994) suggests that the government try to utilise 'top down' approaches when considering education reform, however, research shows top down approaches tend to have a poor history for educational improvement (Fullan, 1994) Furthermore, the government

still remain to use top down approaches for educational reform, and are still continuing to introduce reforms such as the Importance of Teaching White Paper (DfE, 2010) utilising a 'top down' approach (Fullan, 1994). The White Paper document (DfE, 2010) enables the government to take control over how teaching is delivered in England, with the aim of the education system being delivered to children according to their ideology of a high quality education. Michael Gove (the conservative education secretary in 2010) unveiled the white paper to the House of Commons in 2010 stating that the white paper takes the best ideas from other countries and applies them to the English education system (Vasagar, 2010). However, it could be argued that the purpose of this white paper is to emphasise the focus on children's attainment in academic subjects, and sets out guidance to make it easier for head teachers to remove "incompetent teachers" (Vasagar, 2010, p1). Therefore, it could be argued that the government are blaming the flawed English education system on the teachers in the country, and not themselves and their reforms.

According to the Ofsted Annual Report (2011) the government's importance of teaching white paper report (2010) highlights the importance of teaching, and aims to 'close the gap' between specific groups of students, and the report (2010) identifies key themes reflected throughout it. Ofsted (2011) argues that the quality of teaching is too variable, with a variety of teaching throughout England being "no better than satisfactory" (Ofsted, 2011, p40). Furthermore, Ofsted continue to suggest that the education system in England is facing a considerable amount of challenges. Therefore it could be argued that there is an enormous amount of pressure on teachers, to be able to comply to this rigorous criteria to fulfil the government's expectations of teachers. According to Dix (2013) to be graded 'outstanding' by Ofsted, teachers need to deliver a form of "approved pedagogy" and enthral the audience. Furthermore, Dix (2013) goes on to suggest that an Ofsted inspector will make their decision of a

teacher within the first five minutes of a lesson inspection, and that an important aspect of teaching is self-evaluation.

Mujis et al (2011) agrees that self-evaluation is paramount, however suggests that it is not the only aspect of effective teaching. Mujis et al (2011) identifies that there are many contributors to be an effective teacher, and effectiveness is measured by a child's achievement and opportunities provided for a child's learning. Mujis et al (2011) identifies contributors to effective learning and suggests factors that contribute to effective classroom management. For example, lesson planning, starting lessons on time, arranging appropriate seating arrangements, dealing with any behaviour issues or classroom disruptions, talking to the class in an appropriate language, and delivering the curriculum to a high standard, explaining specific aims and objectives, and the purpose behind what they are learning. For example, Wyse et al (2013) suggests that if children are taking part in a handwriting task, the purpose of the task should be thoroughly explained by the teacher. For example, a teacher could be teaching a literacy lesson about punctuation, and the task could be for the class to introduce punctuation into a piece of writing. The teacher would then have to explain the purpose of the punctuation i.e, punctuation makes it easier for readers to read a piece of writing, and it also furthers the child's knowledge about punctuation. Therefore, an effective teacher would be providing a child with the opportunity for learning but with a correct explanation of purpose. Wyse et al (2013) also suggests that an effective teacher gives a child constructive feedback on how to further their knowledge, and that the greatest form of feedback is when a teacher sits next to a child and engages in conversation about how to raise the standard of their work. Nutbrown (1999) would agree with this, and suggest that the most effective form of teaching, is when a child and teacher engage in a two way process.

It could also be suggested that good teachers can provide incentives to enable children to learn by providing them with learning tasks that are fun, and rewarding them for good work, with stickers, merits etc. B.F Skinner (1904-1990) argues that behaviourist approaches are vital in teaching, and that incentives are an essential part of operant conditioning, for example, providing a child with a sticker if they have done an excellent piece of work, to enable the child to continue to perform to a high standard. Skinner believed that positive reinforcers and negative reinforcers were the best way of handing behaviour within the classroom (Gray and MacBlain, 2012). He identified that children should have praise (positive reinforcers) for positive behaviour, and punishments (negative reinforcers) for negative behaviour. However, there is a particular weakness with Skinner's theory. Some children may crave attention, whether it is positive or negative, and this can be a difficult task for teachers to deal with when trying to deliver their lesson to the highest standard (Mellor, 2001) Furthermore, the Importance of Teaching White Paper (2010) plans to address behaviour, by increasing authority and emphasising discipline in schools. However, it could be argued that 'bad behaviour' is just children being disruptive in the classroom, for example, talking when the teacher is trying to teach a lesson. Thus, Alexander (2008) argues that talking and developing social skills is a vital factor of development, so teachers must allow children time for talking. Furthermore, Alexander (2008) suggests that language enables children to further their thinking, and unfortunately, in a classroom setting, teachers do more talking than children. Socio-Constructivist, Lev Vygotsky (1978) believes that language is a vital aspect of development, and that a child's learning environment is an essential contributor to learning (Gray and MacBlain, 2012). Vygotsky valued the teacher, and the role of the adult, and suggested that children need a teacher figure in order to progress their thinking, placing emphasis on how the teacher could help a child to move forward and develop their ideas. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is Vygotsky's model for development,

however, he saw learning as a process that results in development (Gray and MacBlain, 2012). Greatly influenced by Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner adapted the ZPD and introduced the term 'scaffolding' in that the knowledgeable adult acts as a support to guide the child through to the next stage of the ZPD, and by doing this children have extended their knowledge, and been able to do it for themselves the time after (Bruce, 2011).

Overall, it could be argued that there is no one true 'recipe' when it comes to education. As Alexander (2009) argues "work towards a pedagogy of repertoire, rather than recipe, and of principle, rather than prescription." (Alexander, 2009 p28). By this statement, Alexander is suggesting that teachers need to use their own judgements, alongside the curriculum and policy to deliver teaching effectively. On reviewing the evidence, it appears that there is no specific formula for being an effective teacher, as there are many different perspectives that constitute effective teaching. However, teachers have to follow the dominant discourse, which is the government, and the policies they provide. An 'outstanding' teacher could show a great deal of innovative ability and be extremely effective in their role, for example, thinking out of the box, allowing lessons to be fun, enjoyable and informative, thereby maximising a pupils potential for learning. However, this might not strictly fit the government's rigorous criteria. It could be argued that there are many other factors central to a child's learning. For example, being in a happy, nurturing and secure environment to enable them to learn and fulfil their potential. However, the government appear to have a very narrow minded, restricted view of an effective teacher. The word pedagogy and its application to teaching and learning is not discussed within the Importance of Teaching White Paper (DfE, 2010) yet this is an absolutely essential and important aspect of teaching. The government appear to be drawing on ideas from countries such as Singapore, in order to maximise the future potential economy. However in reality, the ideas from Finland, Denmark and Sweden

prove that many of the government's ideas appear to be wrong. In England, the governments focus is purely on summative assessments and testing children to fit into the criteria expected for the country. By contrast, in Finland, formative assessments are utilised with a variety of techniques allowing the teacher's and head teacher's freedom to set their own goals. Teachers are able to plan around the individuals in their class, and it is a more child centred, personal way of teaching children. It could be argued, that although the government look to Finland as a means of mirroring their standards, this has not been actioned. The government still put a considerable amount of focus on standardised testing which places unnecessary pressures on both teachers and children. In conclusion, it could be argued that the government need to look towards the Scandinavian countries as a model for improving teaching and learning in the UK.

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Puppets: A history and the benefits of utilising them in Education and Therapy

Puppets have been around in various forms and used in many cultures throughout history and are still widely used all over the world today (Nicol, 2010; Belfiore, 2013). They are an internationally recognised, multicultural piece of entertainment and educational material (Belfiore, 2013). Alongside the use they have in therapy, supporting many issues in terms of physical and mental health (Hartwig, 2014), they play a role of vital significance in child development and learning, through the forms of communication, creativity, imagination and interaction, both intellectually and emotionally (Ahlcrona, 2012; Belfiore, 2013).

Puppet is translated from the Latin word 'Pupa', which means small creature (Ahlcrona, 2012). There are many different types of puppets: from finger puppets to hand puppets; pop up and paddle; marionettes and shadow (Belfiore, 2013). Puppets are a simple, yet effective learning tool and can become anyone or anything desired (Belfiore, 2013). They have an extremely broad and expansive history throughout many cultures around the world and have a vast range of benefits in development and therapy, which will be highlighted.

Punch and Judy is possibly one of the most widely known puppet shows internationally. Punch and Judy started out in 17th Century Italy by the name of Pulcinella (Speaight, 1995). The actors then took the show all round Europe, with the French adapting it to Polichinelle, before it arrived in England to the original name of 'Punch'. His wife, Judy, came along later. Punch started out as a marionette style puppet, which later became a sock style puppet (Speaight, 1995). Despite being a widely known and popular puppet show in many

countries, it is surprising that the subjects and topics included are accepted in today's society, with violence, domestic violence and child abuse being included topics in the script (Payne Collier, 2000).

Chinese Shadow Puppets began when Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty was suffering from grief of losing someone he loved, Lady Li. He felt low and had lost his desire to reign. One night he witnessed children playing with dolls and saw the shadows they made on the floor. He then felt inspired by this and decided to make his own; first made from paper then hides of donkeys (Fan Pen Chen, 2003). From there, they took off and the stories told were mainly based around politics. Between 1796 and 1800 the shows were banned as the Government feared "peasant uprising". The shows then became popular again in 1821 (Fan Pen Chen, 2003).

Japanese Bunraku Puppets are controlled by three people. The eyes, mouths and fingers move, much like a human, with each bend and turn being performed using a realistic movement style by those controlling them. Bunraku theatre uses a narrator and musicians as separate aspects from the performance alongside the puppeteers, with the many different roles taking place at once to create the complete performance (Mori, 2014). The puppeteers dress in all black, yet are still visible on the stage during the performance. The stories are often about history, legends or tragic love stories. The word 'Bunraku' came from the name of the theatre the shows were originally performed in, then later became the name used for the puppetry art (Mori, 2014).

Indian Puppetry (Koyya Bommalatum) is visual with a focus on dialogue and the use of music. The performances start with a ritual offering "Puja". String puppets (Kalasutri Bahuye) are a traditional form used. Indian puppetry festivals, such as Putul Yatra and Ishara, often take place and are popular events. There are a variety of performance

styles used, including different puppet models and stories from traditional to modern and controversial (Clark, 2005).

Puppets can be suited to any age group and are a popular learning tool used even in television, including shows such as The Muppets, which is child friendly and educational (Belfiore, 2013) and they are also utilised in theatre (Ahlcrona, 2012), such as the adult musical Avenue Q. Creativity and learning through play has been proven to be very beneficial in Early Years Education (Piaget, 1951). Puppets are helpful in assisting children in being actively involved in their own learning, in a fun and imaginative way (Belfiore, 2013). Puppets can be used in storytelling and the arts and help support the development of oral and language skills, social skills and communication (Belfiore, 2013), as well as building self-esteem (Hartwig, 2014). Easy to operate, children can use them as well as teachers/puppeteers (Belfiore, 2013). Puppets can be used as a symbolic educational resource to help develop language and communication, decision-making, confidence and self-awareness (Hartwig, 2014). Puppets can be used help children express emotion and understand their feelings and behaviour. They can also be used in supporting development, using a child-centred approach (Hartwig, 2014). They can also help children explore and understand feelings and emotions (Luckenbill, 2011) with an intellectual and emotional use of interaction, which is both emotive and cognitive (Ahlcrona, 2012).

Steiner schools use puppetry as an educational tool (Nicol, 2010). The philosophy understands how they can be used to help develop imagination and have the ability to fascinate and cast a spell on children. The child can take on the role, which can support the development of memory, as well as increasing vocabulary and communication skills. They can also be used as mediator, which gives the child freedom to speak without judgement (Nicol, 2010). The movement they use is not jerky like cartoons or fast like Punch and

Judy, but peaceful to reflect onto the child's own movement. Kindergarten aged children can use finger and hand puppets with ease and perform tabletop shows and fairy tales using marionettes. The use in play can be little figures and scenes on floor. When presented, the puppet show is done in such a way that it is a full artistic experience, with a cloth unveiling and the use of music (Lyre, children's harp or Kalimba, a thumb piano), which captivates the children (Nicol, 2010). The performance has a beginning, middle and end, which is complete and satisfying for the children. It includes the use of language, movement, music and colour, and if the adult makes any mistakes, it teaches the children that not everything is perfect (Nicol, 2010). Repetition of the story throughout the week enables the children to recreate stories themselves, which helps develop their memory and imagination. Steiner education also incorporates the use of a puppet pocket apron, which is worn by adults. They tell stories or sing rhymes, and the young children enjoy the magical use of the characters appearing and disappearing (Nicol, 2010).

Puppets are a useful educational resource to utilise in Early Years settings, due to the benefits they have on development based on the set Foundation Stage Framework (DfE, 2014). They can link to the prime areas of learning and development, such as communication and language and emotional development, through the use of expressive arts and design. Using puppets in communication and language development, involves the use of opportunities for children to speak and listen, as well as developing their self-expression (DfE, 2014). Puppets also help with physical development, through developing control and coordination through movement (DfE, 2014). Personal, social and emotional development can also benefit through the use of puppets to assist in managing feelings and emotions and learning respect for others (DfE, 2014). Although puppets fit into the expressive arts and design part of the Early Years Framework and help with developing imagination, they can also be used to assist literacy and

numeracy skills as well as understanding the world (DfE, 2014). Puppets are a beneficial educational tool even for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) or emotional needs, as well as those who have English as a Second Language (ESL) (Hartwig, 2014).

The use of Puppets in Child Centred Play Therapy can help support the effects of grief and trauma, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as behaviour support (Hartwig, 2014). They can be used in hospital settings to help children cope with illness and operations. The benefits of utilising Puppets to reduce stigma towards mental illness and to manage conflict are significant, as well as helping to support families experiencing family breakdown, such as divorce or separation. Puppets also support children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), through assisting their skills and development (Hartwig, 2014). Children with autism can lack social skills, which can result in negative outcomes and side effects (Kassardjian *et al,* 2014). The use of social stories is beneficial to help tackle this issue, which is where puppets can come into use through role play, to help assist with social and emotional development (Kassardjian *et al,* 2014). Puppets can be used in speech therapy, through a holistic pedagogy approach. Puppetry combines art with education, therapy and psychology (Lange, 2014). The use of visual, dramatic metaphors comes out in puppetry, which allows the unconscious to naturally come out through expression (Steinhardt, 1994).

Many children, even as young as four, can have misconceptions and negative attitudes towards individuals with disabilities (Dunst, 2012). A puppetry team called Kids on the Block (KOB) travel around schools, performing shows to help tackle these misconceptions, to create a more positive and accepting environment for individuals with disabilities (Dunst, 2012). They provide children with knowledge and understanding to help challenge stereotypes and negative attitudes, raise awareness and empathy and promote inclusion through the

puppet shows they perform. They use life size hand-and-rod puppets of children with and without disabilities, such as physical and intellectual disabilities and visual and hearing impairment (Dunst, 2012). The script involves each puppet describing their disability, the misconceptions associated with it and the similarities and differences between them and other children, as well as interests, capabilities and social relationships. The shows are then followed by a question and answer session, where children have the opportunity to comment and ask the puppets any questions they may have. The use of puppetry has the ability to deliver factual information in an entertaining way that is easily absorbed and understood by children (Dunst, 2012).

Puppetry can enhance the interaction between the child and adult and is enriching for both children and puppeteers (Nicol, 2010). The use that puppets have in developing skills in education and therapy is clear, through supporting many issues in physical and mental health, as well as cognitive development and imagination (Ahlcrona, 2012; Hartwig, 2014). Puppets have extensive history and use in many cultures, as well as a vast variety of benefits, both emotionally and cognitively. There is no end to the creativity and impact puppets can have upon both children and adults (Nicol, 2010).

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Delivering the curriculum and being graded outstanding are central to being an effective primary school teacher – A critical discussion.

This essay will examine the understanding of an effective teacher within the primary school setting. Through critical analysis of the UK Government's ideas, not only will the focus be on government policies and acts, such as the 'National Curriculum' and the 'White Paper,' but also opposing views, comprising the term 'Pedagogy' alongside factors and theorists which influence the discipline.

Following the passing of the 1988 Education Reform Act, the National Curriculum was formed with the purpose of: setting standards for pupil attainment, ensuring an equal education for all and establishing a clearly understood education system which provides a template for all schools to follow; warranting continuity between one school and the next (Ashcroft and Palacio, 1997). However, others suggest this was the government's attempt to reverse the national economic and social decline that was occurring at the time through enhancing the 'traditional' subjects (Lambert and Hopkin, 2014). Due to the profound economic crisis of the 1970's, the government's role in education dramatically increased, shifting the educational power away from professional educationalists to the central government and inducing a strong role from the state in deciding what pupils should be taught (Lambert and Hopkin, 2014). Now, every maintained school in England must follow the National Curriculum by adhering to each subject's content criteria (DfE, 2013).

Under the Education (Schools) Act 1992 'The Office for Standards in Education' (Ofsted) was founded with the responsibility of inspecting schools, to look at: the delivery of the National Curriculum, the quality of education provided, the standards achieved, the efficient management of the financial resources made available to the school, and the children's moral, cultural, spiritual and social development (Education Schools Act, 1992) –

factors which will make them an 'effective teacher' if found in the classroom. Part of this inspection process is lesson observation where teachers are observed in their own classrooms during lesson time. Lessons are then graded on a seven point scale with Grade 1 being 'excellent' and Grade 7 being 'very poor' (Steele, 2000). However, as suggested by Alexander (2010), Ofsted not only inspects using a published criteria (thus potentially inducing 'tunnel vision'), but it can also have a very negative impact upon teachers, causing them to suddenly change their teaching strategies and attitudes in order to meet this criteria. Ofsted's standards are also based on an audit culture which comprises ticking off from a pre-designed criteria which has no regard for the unpredictable nature of children and education (Alexander et al, 2010), as opposed to basing the criteria upon context. Therefore, Ofsted may simply be producing demand characteristics, i.e. teachers are performing in an unnatural manner, and the criteria being used may lack validity when measuring the effectiveness of the teacher.

Though the National Curriculum may be deemed effective in ensuring that equality runs throughout the teaching content of state schools, it also has its critics. The Cambridge Primary Review found that although many accept the principle of the National Curriculum, others feel that it has its demises (Alexander et al, 2010). Through an extensive number of surveys and soundings, it was found that many teachers felt that the National Curriculum is based on standards and is overcrowded - around half of teaching time reportedly being taken up by Maths and English alone (Alexander et al, 2010). Another criticism of the National Curriculum is that it promotes memorisation over understanding due to the constant assessment through examinations (Alexander et al, 2010). Consequently, the teachers' contact hours with the pupils are limited due to the criteria that need to be met for each subject. Bakhurst (2011) suggests that this opulence of content within the curriculum encourages poor teaching as teachers only have enough time to focus on the content that needs to be taught, let alone engaging with the children.

The delivery of the National Curriculum is a highly substantial factor in the government's interpretation of an effective teacher. As stated in the White Paper 2010, an effective primary school teacher is one who: raises

achievement, narrows the attainment gaps between pupils and delivers the curriculum in an inspiring way (DfE, 2010). However, both the White Paper 2010 and the National Curriculum's main focus appears to be *what* needs to be taught instead of specific theories and effective approaches that underpin *how* the teaching should be executed – this is what, as sustained by Professor Robin Alexander, takes us from 'teaching' to 'pedagogy' (Alexander et al, 2010).

The term pedagogy is often reduced to just teaching approaches and interconnected teacher-pupil relationships, however, pedagogy has been said to embrace: values, the learner, the teacher, the notions of knowledge and learning, and the assumptions related to the learning context (Warring and Evans, 2015), as well as being described as the act of teaching alongside: educational theories, justifications, attendant discourse and evidence (Alexander et al, 2010). As put forward by Daniels (2001), the all-inclusive conceptualisation of pedagogy revels the essential relationship between theory and practice. Such models are underpinned by the work of theorists: Jerome Bruner, Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget. Therefore an 'effective pedagogue' could offer more to the teacher and the classroom than just delivering the curriculum. There are many different factors that can contribute to becoming an 'effective pedagogue', including communication and creativity.

When associated with 'effective pedagogy,' the concept of communication involves the ability to understand information; aiding social interaction amongst pupils and the communication between pupils and teachers – all of these factors are said to increase learning and involvement in the classroom (Moon, 2000; Alexander et al, 2010). According to Oates and Grayson (2004), there is both an innate drive and an environmental construction when it comes to communicating, with the innate drive expressing ideas, and desires and the environmental construction as being part of finding out about the world and understanding others - elements of both can be seen in the classroom. An example of communication as an environmental construction in the classroom could be the child asking their teachers questions about the subject topic and the innate drive could be the child expressing their negative emotions towards another child's behaviour.

With regards to the communication between the teacher and child, when communicating knowledge, talk is said to be a highly substantial factor, verbal instruction being described as having distinct and effective assets with respect to the latitude of understanding that learners leave the classroom with (Moon, 2000). Verbal instruction is also said to be more effective than physical demonstration as demonstration alone is alleged to produce a literal and tapered effect (Moon, 2000). A piece of research supported by the UK government supports the importance of communication in the classroom, especially instructional, showing that when teaching mathematics, the instructional communication was more effective than others, i.e. physical demonstration (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2011).

In terms of the role that communication plays as part of the methods of teaching, Bloom's Mastery Learning Model uses a bottom-up - Socratic - strategy where the child acts as the primary agent of the learning process and the teacher teaches the children to their individual capabilities. This has been deemed effective in enabling learning as it provokes thought and allows the child to think for themselves through the teacher presenting the child with thought-provoking questions and situations (Guskey, 2007). There is evidence to suggest that the bottom-up approach is effective, as found in a study by Craft et al, (2014) in which a school known for carrying out the bottom-up approach was graded 'outstanding' by Ofsted, with 98% of the children gaining a Level 4 in both English and maths over a period of three years (Craft et al, 2014 p.20). This approach has links to Vygotsky and his notion of the importance of 'metacognition' where the child understands their own ability and knowledge (Daniels, 2001), as Bloom's model encourages the child to think for themselves. As well as Vygotsky, this theory also includes aspects of Piaget's constructivist approach where children are taught at an individual level through active engagement and discovery learning (Halfpenny and Pettersen, 2014). The 'Multiple Intelligence Model' introduced by Howard Gardner also supports the idea of 'individual teaching' suggesting that different pupils have different strengths, thus learn in different ways (Gardner, 2011). However, Gardner (2011) identified up to eight different ways in which a child can be intelligent, therefore it would be almost impossible for the teacher to develop their lesson plan to suit the needs of a

class of between 20-30 pupils of whom could need up to eight different methods of teaching.

When communicating with peers, the idea of communication as part of being an effective pedagogue has aspects drawn from Vygotsky's socio-constructivist theory of children constructing knowledge from their own environment and in groups of peers, Vygotsky's theory illustrating that peer-interaction is one of the key factors for constructing knowledge (Miller, 2003). Piaget also suggests this by proposing that the social interaction with peers is a powerful and vital part of cognitive development, however, this aspect of his work is often disregarded as his main focus is upon children working on their own as '*lone scientists*' (Halfpenny and Pettersen, 2014 p.155). As discussed by Mercer (1995), there are three types of talk in relation to communication between children. These include 'Disputational' talk, whereby the point of view is stated by the individual without taking others' views into consideration (thus involving a lot of dispute), 'Cumulative' talk, where speakers build uncritically on what others have said by accumulating others' opinions and 'Exploratory' talk, which sees one building on their own knowledge through the critiquing of their own and others' points of views, which is seen as a process through which a joint agreement is eventually met (Mercer, 1995). In order for communication to become effective in the classroom, it has been found that 'exploratory' talk is most effective and is the type of talk which should be encouraged when children are allowed to communicate with each other (Mercer et al, 1999). As well as Piaget, Bruner also supports the idea of communication between peers in the classroom through his social-interactionist theory, where learners are seen to construct new knowledge from others based on, and to build upon, what they already know (Smidt, 2011). This could be executed in the classroom through allowing children to do group work which involves a lot of communication, i.e. getting them to design a poster on a broad topic together; for example 'the creatures that you may find in a tree'.

Another factor, in some ways related to communication, is creativity. Creativity is not just the ability to paint, draw or play a musical instrument, but it is the child's ability to select various pieces of information and apply

them in a new situation to create an original response which is new to themselves (Beetlestone, 1998). As supported by Duffy (2006) the desire to create is something present in all humans due to the sense of ownership from what has been created as well as the pleasure that the creative process generates. In addition to the need to create being down to an innate drive, as projected by Craft (2001), it is also important due to the promptly changing world that we live in. Therefore it can be said that creativity is an important skill to encourage in today's children in order to set them up for life's challenges in the modern day world. There are other ways in which encouraging creativity in children is important, including: the ability to communicate their feelings non-verbally, to characterise their perceptions when understanding their work, to increase their understanding of the world, to build resilience, to increase self-esteem through the sense of achievement, for ownership and self-identity, and to help them to solve problems in the classroom thus leading to the attainment of mastery (Duffy, 2006).

In order for the child to be creative they need be able to engage with the environment around them (Beetlestone, 1998), a theory underpinned by the work of Bruner; who emphasised the importance of the child's engagement with their environment (Smidt, 2011). The teacher needs to provide the child with the skills required by the task, without getting in the way of the child's own creative process - though the adult should respond to the child and facilitate them with making that decision (Beetlestone, 1998) – this has links to the principle, built upon Vygotsky's model of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), known as 'scaffolding' introduced by Wood et al., (1976), whereby the teacher aids the learner through the task by helping them with skills and difficulties which are out of the learners capacity (Miller, 2003) - the area past the learners capacity being the ZPD- an example of this could be when asking the child to write a story; encouraging them to tap into prior knowledge in order to inspire them think about their own experiences for inspiration. Bruner also offers insight into the role of the adult when guiding the child through the ZPD, suggesting that the language used by the teacher should be simple enough yet challenging to encourage creative thought so that the child can then apply the skills learnt from the task to other challenges (Smidt, 2011).

An additional way in which creativity can be taught to children is through how the curriculum is delivered. In 2010, creativity throughout English primary schools ended sharply, the Conservation-Coalition government carried out a National Curriculum review whereby the focus was set upon the core areas of: English, mathematics, science and physical education (DfE, 2011). The narrower proposed curriculum was later revealed in 2012, children were labelled as being defenceless, inactive and novices - a sharp contrast to the past focus on children being active and capable (Craft, 2011) the previous decade. Craft et al., (2014) compared two schools who are nationally well-known for promoting creativity in the school environment; one of which had co-constructed part of the curriculum (known to the school as the 'creative curriculum') to suit the children's individual requirements – though it was felt amongst the teachers that the constant assessments from the National Curriculum hindered the 'creative curriculum' greatly. It was found that even though one of the schools had over 10% of the children gaining free school meals, as well as a higher than average amount of children with special educational needs, they had both been graded outstanding by Ofsted, with high attainment in both English and Maths (Craft et al., 2014). A high percentage of children in both schools achieved exceptional grades, exceeding their predicted, in the core subjects - this is alleged to be down to the high levels of commitment concerning creativity (Craft et al., 2014). The factors within the schools that underpinned creativity included: the child's ownership of the curriculum when asking what *they* wanted and involving them in the planning process, encouraging children's decision making, making creative learning environments capitalising on the students' curiosity, enriching topics with 'inspire day' where guest speakers were invited to the school, extra-curricular activities and clubs such as 'eco-school' as well as the association of subjects with real-life experiences through trips and science experiments (Craft et al., 2014).

Though the government has been seen to support creativity, for example, The Primary Strategy suggesting that '*promoting creativity is a powerful way of engaging pupils with their learning'* (DfES, 2003 pg.3), there is little insight into *how* teachers can incorporate it into the classroom. As well as this, it can be argued that the National Curriculum hinders the opportunity for creativity

in the classroom due to the focus on core subjects and constant preparing for assessments and short term goals (Duffy, 2006).

To conclude, there are enough clues to suggest the effectiveness of the factors 'communication' and 'creativity' in the classroom when underpinning effective pedagogy. Nonetheless, there is indication that the UK government does recognise the proposed effectiveness of these factors alongside the theories which underpin them, however there is also evidence to suggest that the National Curriculum hinders the opportunity for true pedagogy to flourish in the classroom due to the constant pressure on teachers to meet the assessment and outcome goals. Therefore, what needs to be considered for the future is whether the focus for policy should be upon the government's current emphasis on the *educational attainment* from primary education, or the *process* of learning as part of the child's educational experience. From evidence, it is clear that some teachers recognise the importance of both, however appear to be struggling to balance the focus between the two due to the vast needs of the National Curriculum.

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Primary teaching is not what it used to be: A critical analysis of the changing nature of primary teachers' and leaders' work, identity and professionalism.

Political, social and economic ideologies have deep roots in primary education (Alexander, 2004) and the dynamic nature of such factors are ever changing the demands of teaching. The largest education reform in Britain, the Education Reform Act (1988), which was socially constructed and mediated though neo –liberal ideology and congruent political action (Crawford, 1998) which motivated the restructure towards an accountable, standardised and quantifiable education system (Foster & Wilding, 2000). Successive governments have intensified the demands made from Conservative action through the construction of the National Curriculum, and an abundance of initiatives and policies subsequently implemented, have drawn on the commonality of driving up educational standards. However, not only are teachers struggling with the consequential workload but the imposition of persistent government agendas has threatened, or some may comment redefined, teachers and leaders professionalism and identity. This essay will explore inherent tensions surrounding teachers and leaders work, their professionalism and identity, evidencing that primary teaching is not what it used to be.

It is useful to set some context in order to demonstrate how the nature of primary teaching has changed. The post war age saw great confidence in the modern project of education that was deemed capable of aiding the construction of a better society (Doherty, 2007). Thus, teachers and the profession were held in high esteem by society and policy makers (Tight, 2010). Conceptions of teacher's professionalism in this age circled round concern for holistic broad education goals, delivered by teachers whose identity commonly

involved integrity, professional commitment and an intrinsic motivation (Mausethagen & Granlund, 2012) congruent with Plowden's (1967) constructions of holism, humanism and the profession as a vocation (Woods and Jeffrey, 2002). Hargraves (2000) cites an age of the autonomous professional where there was a ubiquitous feeling that curriculum research, development and implementation belonged to the teacher and was crucial to the professional identity of teachers (Howells, 2003) and was a key source of their professionalism and work (McCulloch et al, 2000). This era of education is often referred to as the Golden Age of education, where there was public trust in the teaching profession that they knew what was best for their children, giving little reason for the state to intervene (Whitty, 2000). There was little consistency in education at this time as teachers had the freedom to teach what they felt necessary, which often consisted of lessons leaning heavily towards the teachers strongest subject area. In this vein the National Curriculum was implemented to ensure that a broad and balanced curriculum was being delivered to all children nationwide, the implications of such on the teaching profession in latter years could not have been anticipated. The notion of the Golden Age of education is irrefutable, however, in a modern day context the notion is somewhat romanticised as it has little relevance to our current education system that is performance driven (Tight, 2010) and the nature of the profession that has to adhere.

The economic crisis in 1970's in the UK was a pivotal moment in education as it fuelled public discontentment with education which led to primary education being challenged (Alexander, 2010). The Great Debate of Education in 1976, delivered by Lord Callaghan, greatly criticised the Plowden report (1967) which endorsed child centred teaching and the teacher's role as a guiding, stimulating one rather than a didactic one. The speech initiated the quest for a more standardised accountable education system (Foster & Wilding, 2000), one which Bonnett (1996) comments was the stimulus to change the

culture and ethos of schooling akin to that of a business enterprise, signalling the upheaval neoliberal agendas throughout education. The introduction of the primary National Curriculum in 1988 through the Education Reform Act saw the beginnings of governments control extend (Parker, 2015) through a form of democratic totalitarianism. Change was achieved through compliance and coercion to central demands (Webb et al, 2004) and initiated what can reasonably be termed as the 'new professionalism' era (Evans, 2011).

Sachs (2001) comments on the struggle between interest groups of education for consensus on what counts as teacher professionalism and the nature of it. An ambivalence has surrounded the idea of teaching as a profession (Connell, 2009) which remains a deeply contested issue within our society (Furlong et al, 2000). Goepel (2012) comments that teacher professionalism is influenced by governments, their policies, the public, media and the profession itself, lending to the notion that professionalism is not a static state. Indeed, Troman (1996 cited in Evans, 2008 p22) stated that professionalism is socially constructed and contextually variable which is constantly changing and being redefined at different times to serve different interests (Helsby, 1999). Since New Labour came into power in 1997 they have set the precedent for explicit agendas of redefining teacher professionalism (Swann et al, 2010) which has been carried forth by successive governments, most recently in Teachers Standards (DfE, 2012) which sets baseline expectation from the point of qualification to professional practice and conduct. To an extent Clarke & Newman (1997) are accurate in their declaration that teacher professionalism is a vocation. Increasingly, teachers' obedience to government policy has led to the government marking this as a source of their professionalism, and here lies dispute between state and teachers (Gray & Whitty, 2010). In this regard the state view teachers as functionaries, and not as independent professionals whose expertise is part of an international occupational group which has worldwide

applicability (Graham, 1998). Hargreaves (2000) notes this age as the post professional age where teachers are caught in a struggle between stakeholders constantly re-defining teacher professionalism. Goepel (2012) begs the question, to what extent can professionalism be expressed through compliance to external obligatory standards?

Seemingly trust does not appear to exist in the profession anymore (Townsend, 2011). An emerging culture of teaching to the test (Sturman, 2003) in cases has been adopted in order to conform to competition driven ideal of education which enshrines neoliberal distrust (Connell, 2009). This divorces knowledge from the knower and moreover dehumanises the profession (Gray, 2006) giving impetus to concerns of the erosion of teacher professionalism because of the imposition of a nationally prescribed curriculum and pedagogical approaches which have abundant links to marketisation (Webb et al, 2004). Such impositions from the government are disrespectful and fail to show repute for teachers' professionalism (Goodson & Hargreaves 1996). In contrast, the government view such reforms as re-professionalising that are designed to be in keeping with the demands of a new era (Whitty, 2000).

Like professionalism, much literature surrounds the notion that teacher identity is also a dynamic process, an unstable entity and as multifaceted (Anspal et al, 2012: Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009: Day et al, 2006) similarly attaining that the notion of identity is difficult to define (Verloop, 2004). Traditionally teacher identity was associated with humanistic beliefs about the teaching role (O'Connor, 2008) and commonly exudes passion which gives teachers a sense of purpose, which is integral to self-efficacy, job satisfaction and success (Santoro et al, 2012). Indeed, Alsup (2006) commented on the transformative discourse of teacher identity that included intellectual, corporeal and emotional aspects, synchronising with the fact there is uncertain distinction between professional and personal identity (Beauchamp &

Thomas, 2009) as teaching demands considerable personal investment (Day, 2006). Such intangible emotion invested by teachers into their profession is not measureable (O'Connor, 2008) and is a source of tension between the metric of performance (Ball, 2003). The narrow lines of a performativity in the education system strikes at the roots of teacher commitment as the human element of identity and professionalism, previously upheld, has given way to commodity experience which ultimately is damaging to self-confidence and constructions of teacher identity (Woods & Jeffrey, 2002). There is somewhat of a crisis as Gray (2006) sums up that subjective matter is the discourse of the profession and varies between altruism and the idea of a vocation for public good, or by contrast, individuals interested in themselves and their careers.

Not only has the Government explicitly set to redefine teacher professionalism and identity, or as Ozga (2000) suggests completely eradicate it by destroying the ability to question and challenge government's educational agendas, the introduction of the National Curriculum has changed the very nature of their work and the issue of professional autonomy is a primary controversy (Mausethagen & Granlund, 2012). After the introduction of the National Curriculum and reformed education system, accountability preceded autonomy (Evans, 2008). Thus teachers and leaders work had to adapt to be measurable to satisfy the new demands of accountability and performativity. Alexander et al (1992, cited in Alexander 2004 p. 9) commented that the government should not prescribe how to teach. However, seemingly this is exactly what the government have achieved by, not only directing the content of subjects, but even recommending how they should be taught evident particularly in the introduction of the national literacy and numeracy strategies (Galton & MacBeth, 2010) a further intrusion into teacher professionalism (Robinson, 2012). The persistent intrusions in education from the government, Alexander (2008) argues has overlooked the importance

of knowing and understanding why a particularly approach to teaching and learning is being implemented, indeed he suggests understanding 'why' is crucial for empowerment, especially in this age to challenge government dominant discourses. Moreover, such authors like Ozga & Lawn (1988), Hargreves (1994) and Easthope, & Easthope (2000), among numerous others, have described the demands of work teachers' deal with, and more recently describe an intensification of teachers and leaders work load.   Stevenson (2007) cites the sense of frustration teachers feel at not being able to fulfil their own expectations and not meeting the expectations of other stakeholders. Such frustrations has led to the commonality of an overwhelming sense of stress and burnout apparent throughout the profession (Travers & Cooper, 1996) effecting the retention and recruitment within the profession (Robinson, 2012).

The Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander, 2010) stated that depressed standards are a result of constricted teachers and condemned the state theory of learning, or rather increasingly, 'teaching to the test'. The government have recognised through the White Paper (DfE, 2010) teachers' constraint at meeting government directives and in doing such gives little tender to the rhetoric government initiatives to increase teacher autonomy and reduce the burden of workload. Day's (2008) research has validated that such workloads has reduced the time available for teachers to connect and tune into the needs of individuals in their classes resulting in teachers being cynical about the proposed benefits of more government initiated change. This further evidences that teaching is not what it used to be. Teachers now find little time for the premise of the profession, to connect with pupils. Instead they are occupied with imposition government agendas.

Educational reform has curtailed the professional judgement and identity of teachers, which is also relatable with head teachers, and

furthering this are witness to increasing managerialism (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999), which has shifted the locus of control and re shaped the role and work of the head teachers. Grace (1995) commented on the change in the head teacher's work from one concerned with culture and pedagogy to one positioned round managerialism and the education market. The pivotal moment in redefining the work of head teachers was published in the Green Paper which envisaged a performance management style which has roots in dominant managerialism ideology that the government explicitly marked as the new direction for management (Mahony & Hextall, 2000). In reality this has moved the principal from what used to be an intrinsic senior colleague to one of a detached manager (Sachs, 2001). This is a far cry from the lead professional role a head teacher adopted which epitomised the Golden Age of education. Securing effective management of a school, reflective of Conservative government action, was seen as a sure way in driving up educational standards but the government seem to assert the importance of leadership however fail to demonstrate it (Storey, 2004). This dispassionately configures the role and work of a head teacher to that of a chief executive (Townsend et al, 2011) validating that the role and work of a head teacher is now akin to schools business manager (Robinson, 2012). Effectively the pressures of the performativity that has consumed the education system has shifted the culpability for educational attainment away from the state system and the onus onto individual schools, which ultimately the head teacher is liable for, to an effect using head teachers as scape goats (Gewirtz, 1997).

In conclusion, seemingly now teaching is a performance, and the undeniable freedoms teachers experienced before the introduction of the National Curriculum have been overturned by continuous prescription to neoliberal agendas in efforts to raise educational standards. Disharmonies and tensions are apparent as the culture of care that has conceptualised the teaching profession (Nias, 1999) has

been progressively undermined by the tyranny of accountability, performance, tables, targets and testing (Galton & MacBeath, 2008). The twenty first century could not be further away from achieving autonomous teacher professionalism, the multidirectional gaze of stakeholders of education and the coerciveness of government agendas impacting on teaching has led to the imposition of severe forms of teacher self-regulation which arguably is now defined as professionalism (Bourke et al, 2015). The removal of discretionary power in approaches to teaching and learning by the constraints imposed by bureaucracy (Case, et al, 2000) has reduced the profession to simply deliverers of the curriculum (Trowler, 2003) whose success is determined by conformism to a document (Gray, 2006). There is little opportunity to view teachers as free thinking professionals, most qualified to meet the needs of learners (Alexander, 2004) giving some truth to Hargreaves' wounding caricature of teachers as 'drones and clones of policy makers' anaemic ambitions' (2003, p 2). Alexander's (2008) proclamation in the importance of teachers regaining and understanding 'why' approaches to education, teaching and learning are implemented, is imperative for teachers to become empowered to flip the current top down bureaucratic imposition in education, and return to somewhat of a bottom up approach to education.

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The Phonics Screening Check and the teaching of reading in primary schools.

This paper will discuss the debate surrounding the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) and the method of teaching reading in schools. Despite a lack of reliable research evidence, and facing contrary evidence, which will be presented, the Coalition Government pressed ahead with the Importance of Teaching White Paper (2010) and the PSC was made statutory from 2012. Discussions will take place around the governments' disregard of academic research which has called for changes to the methods of teaching reading and the abolition of the Phonics Screening Check. The government's use of PISA's 2012 (OECD, 2012) and previous years' publications of the global reading performance statistics to influence policy making will be reviewed. Systematic synthetic phonics instruction has been a central element in policy guidance since the election of the Coalition government and in the current government (Clark, 2014) This guidance includes using this method as the first, fast and only approach to phonics instruction along with the Phonics Screening Check. Evidence will be evaluated that has been presented by Brundrett (2015) suggesting that we are now seeing a demise in the expert view. Brundrett (2015) suggests the government are no longer calling on empirical evidence and the opinion of well-regarded academics when introducing policies. Instead choosing to focus on taking a neo liberal/neo conservative viewpoint and pressing ahead with changes which haven't been justified with evidence. Wyse (2007) called for a review of the evidence used that suggested phonics instruction and the phonics screening check will improve the reading ability of children which will be discussed in this paper. A mixed method approach, teamed with establishing a passion for reading and gaining an understanding of text will be demonstrated as a way forward to develop our reading performance on the global stage, so keenly monitored by current and past governments.

With a number of highly regarded academics, authors, teachers, all highlighting the use of the first and fast approach of systematic synthetics

instruction as the sole method of teaching reading and the introduction of the phonics screening check as a serious cause of concern, questions have to be raised as to what drove the government to introduce such a controversial policy? The Importance of Teaching White Paper (DfE, 2010) aim was to embed and extend many of the initiatives Margaret Thatcher implemented more than 20 years ago (Brundrett, 2015). The recommendations were bold, dramatic and extremely controversial. The Neo conservative supporters rejoiced as the paper called for a more demanding curriculum, in order for the U.K. to maintain pace with our peers globally (Ball, 1996). Brundrett (2015) goes as far as to suggest the introduction of the Importance of Teaching white paper (DfE, 2010) and the sweeping changes it has introduced through the Education Act 2011 (DfE, 2011), has led our education system to revert back to the traditional elementary education system of 1944 with an emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy. Neo liberal political ideology can also be identified as running through current conservative and past coalition governments' education policies. Bartlett and Burton (2007) suggests neo liberalists strive for education policy to centred around the economy, and require a closer connection between schooling and paid work. This can be referred to as a market orientated philosophy.

Teaching is now being driven by standardised testing, such as the phonics screening check, and performance outcomes (Bartlett and Burton, 2007) The Conservative party manifesto (Conservative Party, 2010) referred to Britain slipping down international education leagues. The current government have now made it a legal requirement that all schools take part in international testing should they be required (DfE, 2011). This statutory requirement ensures schools take part in PISA surveys, monitoring our global performance, our children's potential to compete on the global stage. The Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD, 2012) is a collaborative project which carries out surveys every three years to determine the educational achievement of 15 year olds. PISA (OECD, 2012) reported back their findings which concluded that the reading performance of England's 15 year olds did not differ greatly from the PISA surveys conducted in 2009 and 2006. However, the survey did conclude that the number of countries outperforming England increased to 17, 12 in 2009 and 7 in 2006. Interestingly, this statistic became the focus for the government.

Indeed Michael Gove made a speech to the Houses of Parliament in response to the survey suggesting our children were being left behind in the global race and calling upon the PISA results to support the use of the Phonics Screening Check and use of phonics instruction (Gove, 2013).

The government heavily relied upon the Rose Report (2006) when introducing the Importance of Teaching White Paper (DfE 2010). It was the government's stance in this paper that the instruction to schools to teach children to read through systematic synthetic phonics instruction, coupled with the Phonics Screening Check would improve reading ability and in turn improve our global reading performance. The Rose Report (2006) utilised the findings of the Johnson and Watson (2004) study to make national policy recommendations. However, this study was vociferously criticised by Wyse (2008) in a review of the evidence presented by the government to support the change to synthetic phonics. Wyse (2008) concluded there was no reliable, empirical evidence presented to support adopting this method as the preferred method. The available research at the time supported systematic tuition coupled with meaningful print experiences. Wyse (2008) concluded that the Rose Report's conclusions were based on claims not an arduous examination of evidence. Indeed Jim Rose (2006) himself conceded "Despite uncertainties in research findings……..synthetic phonics offers the vast majority the best route". Wyse (2008) highlighted a number of flaws with the evidence presented in the Rose Report (2006) including the study design not being rigorous enough, lack of randomised control trials of the method suggested, and the fact that there was no empirical evidence to justify the report recommending that teaching of reading must use the synthetic approach.

There has also been a large amount of criticism aimed at the phonics screening check itself. The check does not test a child's understanding of the text, it only tests their ability to read words out loud to a teacher. This method of teaching is reticent of Neo conservative ideology for the need for testing and assessment (Ball, 1996). Teachers are under immense pressure to teach to this test. Garratt and Forrester (2012) would question where the real learning is when teaching to the test? The U.K.L.A. (2012) highlighted in their survey that teachers are fully aware of a child's capabilities given the amount

of rigorous testing and assessments that happen throughout the school year and some are surprised at the pass rate of some pupils which would support the Hawthorne Effect theory (Wyse, 2008). The UKLA's (2012) survey highlighted the opinions of teachers who believed that schools should use the check judiciously and not impose it on every child, allowing the teacher to use their professional judgement. Many academics are concerned that there is a distinct lack of faith in teacher assessment even though evidence presents teachers can make valid judgements and can accurately monitor pupil progress in key reading skills (Snowling et al, 2011). Brundrett (2015) suggests the views of academics are being ignored by government, and calls for dialogue and consensus when implementing or suggesting policy changes. Brundrett (2015) also claims that government policy makers are dismissing alternative views and approaches to curriculum innovation. This opinion strengthens the argument put forward by Hursh (2007) who advocated that neo liberal policies present as if there is no alternative.

However, concern has been raised at the distribution of marks in the check. Clark (2014) questioned the validity of the check due to the existence of a spike in the percentage of children on the pass mark of 32 compared with the fail mark of 31. Clark (2014) suggests this could be teachers marking up pupils in order for them to pass. If the pass mark was removed when analysing data the true pass mark would be a lot lower than the government would have us believe (Clark, 2014). The government acknowledged this concern (NFER, 2014) and tried to allay these concerns by withholding the pass mark from schools until after the checks had been carried out. As the threshold pass mark stayed the same it was inevitable that the spike in the distribution of marks remained as teachers worked towards the previous two years' pass mark.

Margaret Clark (2014) raised serious apprehensions in her evidence based critique of synthetic phonics and literacy learning with regard to what methods teachers are actually using in the classroom. Reporting NFER (2014) research commissioned by DfE on the success of the phonics screening check, Clark (2014) emphasised the reports finding that there was very little evidence to suggest many schools are actually teaching systematic synthetic phonics as the first and fast approach and many teachers are using

the approach alongside other methods. Clark (2014) also notes concerns at the lack of support given to libraries and the valuable part they play in supporting children's literacy learning. This view is supported by the National Literacy Trust (Clark, 2011) who reported that public library use has a strong correlation to motivation, behaviour and school attainment as well as having a positive outcome for reading attitudes. This study also highlights the importance libraries play to support learning outside of the classroom environment including support for family engagement. Clark (2014) makes calls for investment in Libraries and investment in facilities to support parents and families to develop a passion for reading which this paper lends support to. The author Michael Rosen has been extremely vocal sharing his thoughts on the governments "imposition of intensive, systematic phonics teaching on English schools" (Rosen, 2014). Rosen is keen to see the phonics screening test abolished. Michael Rosen supports the view that a systematic synthetic approach to teaching children to read does not solve the economic crisis of our global reading performance and in fact it can lead to other problems (Rosen, 2014).

As demonstrated in this essay, the government ignored concern from academics and teachers alike and pressed ahead to introduce its policy. The governments' own evaluation does not acknowledge that the phonics screening check improves reading ability (NFER, 2014). Given this government's neo conservative/neo liberal desire to implement a traditional elementary education system with the emphasis on basic literacy and numeracy it is hard to foresee a new direction being taken any time soon. Wyse (2008) suggests, due to weak evidence to support the emphasis on synthetic phonics instruction, there is a need to alter the framework and in doing so, would result in empirical evidence being more accurately reflected. Wyse (2008) also recommends adopting a teaching programme which consists of phonics teaching which takes into consideration the child as an individual, their development and their learning style coupled with a more balanced approach to the teaching of reading. As Holden states "The path of a reader is not a runway, but more a hack through a forest, with individual twists and turns entanglements and moments of surprise" (Holden, 2004 as cited in National Literacy Trust, 2006 pg.2). Each child is unique, their path to reading could be made more treacherous with the introduction of this

check and the reinforcement of phonics instruction as the only method to teach reading. As Michael Rosen (2014) suggests we have to resist the government's desire to the first, fast and only approach to reading as phonics instruction and ensure we encourage reading for pleasure, reading for understanding as part of learning for life.

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