A Critical Policy Analysis of *Raise the Bar* as the Most Recent Neoliberal Education Reform Rollout in Nova Scotia

BY

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Abstract

This thesis is a critical policy analysis examining a public education administrative review in Nova Scotia, Canada by Dr. Avis Glaze. Twenty-two recommendations for improving student performance and educational outcomes were outlined in the official document, *Raise the Bar*. Dr. Glaze's recommendations were rooted in efficiency, austerity, and improving accountability. Soon after, Nova Scotia passed the Education Reform Act, officially adopting almost all of the recommendations Dr. Glaze provided. Many sweeping changes to education and administration have resulted, such as the removal of school boards. During the implementation of Dr. Glaze's recommendations, the impacts on equitable education outcomes have been felt across many stakeholders including teachers and students. This analysis considers the conditions that led to Dr. Glaze's review to assess if equitable education outcomes are achievable now, four years after Raise the Bar. Examining who benefits from education reform rollouts (and why), this thesis argues that changes to education are necessary for equitable educational outcomes but cannot be meaningfully implemented as a neoliberal project.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Apple (2001) passionately posits that "we need to ask constantly what reforms do to schools as a whole and each of their participants, including teachers, students, administrators, community members, local activists, and so on" (p. 416). The process to evaluate reforms ushers in a series of process evaluations, understanding inherent power imbalances, and drivers for motivation (to name a few). The examination provided in this thesis seeks to make sense of the most recent education reform in Nova Scotia, Canada.

In late 2017, the province under Liberal leadership hired educational consultant Dr. Avis Glaze. With the price tag of $75,000, the purpose of Dr. Glaze was to conduct an independent analysis of the provincial education system. Resultingly, the end product, *Raise the Bar*, signifies the most recent steering of neoliberal reform in Nova Scotia. In Glaze's post haste report, *Raise the Bar*, several recommendations provided are based on two primary methods of data collection. First, Glaze's research from an online study and qualitative interviews. Second, student performance scores on the most recent standardized tests were bolstered as indicators of success. *Raise the Bar* acknowledges its role in "making Nova Scotia's education system succeed, through better governance and administrative practices" (Glaze 2018, p. 1). Such declaration is anything but neutral. Accordingly, this thesis responds to Apple's call to action by addressing the implications of neoliberal education reform through Glaze's recommendations as outlined in her report *Raise the Bar*, examining who benefits and, accordingly, what the significance reveals.

The Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) maintains responsibility for the governance and administration of public education, and as such, is "entrusted with providing the policies, priorities, and overall leadership for the province's public education system" (Glaze 2018, p. 7). The EECD operates by the elected provincial party whose Premier appoints an education minister. The EECD department, led by an appointed official, act as gatekeepers and primary decision-makers responsible for knowledge creation and dissemination.

Critical policy sociology serves to contextualize across time and space, to make sense of how a specific moment in time came to be and its related importance (Gale, 2001). Published in January 2018, *Raise the Bar* effectively became the product of a "bold" timeline (Glaze 2018, p. 3) – fewer than three months from the beginning of research to submitting the report. The twenty-two recommendations in *Raise the Bar* quickly received scrutiny across various stakeholders (Parris, 2018; CAPTTO, 2018; DeVet, 2018). The most the most vocal opposition belongs to Nova Scotia Teacher's Union (NSTU) (Nova Scotia Teachers Union, 2018a; Doucet, 2018).

The EECD unanimously – and imperiously – adopted the recommendations *in Raise the Bar* officially in Bill 72, *The Education Reform Act* (Gorman, 2018), effectively instigating what education minister at the time stated as "the most significant changes to education that we've seen in 30 to 50 years" (as cited in Ritchie, 2019). The conditions that led to neoliberal education reform in 2018 provide essential insights into the overarching public creed at the time. As schools are not insular, critical policy sociology is aptly suited to consider the intersections of youth, schooling, inclusion, and education policymaking. Simply put, the magnitude of education is not limited to the school. Public education dynamically transects multiple public and private spheres, including culture, technology, political systems (including regulation), the economy, and so on. Thus, a multifaceted approach to 'tease out' the nuances is an apposite task to fully comprehend policy effectiveness in different domains.

Critical policy sociology considers the official and unofficial documents and accounts relevant to examine the wider social implications. This thesis employs a primary function in critical policy sociology – to deepen the critical understanding of a meaningful moment legitimized through government endorsement. In this case, the significance hinges on the latest education reform in Nova Scotia in 2018, when Glaze's report was published in January that year. The length of time between when *Raise the Bar* was published, and Bill 72 was passed, is a few weeks – six, to be exact.

At the time of writing, it has been almost four years exactly since Bill 72, *The Education Reform Act*. This thesis provides a purview of neoliberal education reforms as disingenuous, unsustainable, and inequitable both broadly speaking, as well as its local relevance in Nova Scotia. It will examine the viability and implications of recommendation from Glaze's report, *Raise the Bar*, affirming the document as less helpful than it sets out to be. In conclusion, this thesis argues the reasonable premise requiring education reform, but takes care to discern any reform efforts should be markedly different than any of the ways accomplished in the province historically. That is, education reform can be a complementary and progressive opportunity to improve education outcomes; however, to do so must be outside of the neoliberal doctrine. In this sense, any future education reform seeking to be liberating must embrace emancipatory learning and critical pedagogical practices that work toward social change.

Chapter 2: A Brief History of Public Education in Nova Scotia

> "In order to enhance their individual marketability and to compete for jobs, [student] view the education system as knowing only one objective: it's seen as the means to get ahead financially" Frost (2020)

In Grant Frost's book published in 2020, *The Attack on Nova Scotia Schools: The Story behind 25 years of tumultuous change*, traces educational history from the early 1990s, arguing the preliminary unveiling of neoliberalism in education is relatively recent. Other published works corroborating the era of neoliberal education reforms in Nova Scotia include the PhD dissertation by Dr. Pamela Rogers (2018), "Tracing Neoliberal Governmentality in Education: Disentangling Economic Crises, Accountability, and the Disappearance of Social Studies" and *Best School in the World: How Students, Teachers and Parents Have Created a Model that Can Transform Canada's Public Schools* by Molly Hurd (2017). Otherwise, little has been published revealing the symbiotic relationship between neoliberalism and education reform in Nova Scotia.

The Liberals (1993 to 1999)

Under the majority Liberal government, led by Premier John Savage since 1993, the province took similar approaches to policy at that time: reduce deficits and open markets (Frost, 2020). Known as the "Savage days" for swift austerity measures (right in line with neoliberalism), two education reports "set the tone for educational recourse" (Frost, 2020). In 1994, *Restructuring Nova Scotia's Education System, Preparing Students for a Lifetime of Learning (Restructuring)* was the first, followed by *Education Horizons, White Paper on Restructuring the Education System (Horizons)* the following year, in 1995. The trend of policy documents recommending change based on being and doing not "good enough" begins with these two documents (Rogers, 2018; Frost, 2020). Both policies set a requisite for Nova Scotians to shift mindsets, particularly about the economy. Frost (2020) asserts that these documents reasoned the education system shifting to accommodate the preparation for students of "the impending and inevitable drastic changes in the job

market" – which, furthermore, Frost attributes to shifting the economy away from being resource-based to an economy that is knowledge-based. At the same time, the empirical evidence simply was minute, if at all available (Frost, 2020). Both presented standardized scores as calls to action. Notably, Rogers (2018) posits the parallel with the pressure to succeed in the global economy with Nova Scotia's response, "to not fall behind the rest of the world." Nova Scotian students were faced pressure to ensure their province's performance in a global economy did not falter on their account – a rather significant mandate to be tasked.

Restructuring (1994) and *Horizons* (1995) are described by Frost (2020) as "evolving visions of the purpose of public education." For example, *Restructuring* (Department of Education, 1994) positions students as lifelong learners while simultaneously underscoring employment skills like teamwork and problem solving. *Horizons* (1995) went further. The emphasis in *Horizons* (1995) centred on "economic stability and growth," achievable through students focusing on workplace skills – and not, as previously stated – personal growth.

Moreover, the bold claim that Nova Scotia "graduates lack the basic skills required in the global marketplace" noted in *Horizons* (Department of Education, 1995, p. 9) can be rightly attributed to lingering sentiments for decades. Together, both *Restructuring* (Department of Education, 1994) and *Horizons* (Department of Education, 1995) kicked off neoliberal education reforms in the province; nonetheless, many Department developments and additional documents after their publication in the mid-1990s demonstrates a continuous backbone reifying Nova Scotia's commitment to education. The Liberal government came to an end in 1999, when the Progressive Conservatives (PC) were in power for the next decade.

The Progressive Conservatives (1999 to 2009)

The three main education policies during the conservative reign are *Racial Equity Policy* (Department of Education, 2002b), *Learning for Life: Planning for Success* (Department of Education, 2002a), and *Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together* (Department of Education, 2005). Rogers (2018), notes that together, "the policies in the 2000's were optimistic in comparison, with respect to the economy and the education system" (pp. 77-8). Known for austerity measures, the PC leadership the aim to reduce the provinces deficit within two years of being elected, the government under Hamm required departments to adjust budgets decreasing costs of up to 30 per cent and such changes in public-sector spending brought in tense moments (Progressive Conservative Party of Nova Scotia, 2003). At the time, projections set education to lose at minimum 700 teacher's jobs and 1,100 support staff, thus inevitably leading to protests and advocacy efforts by teachers, parents and students with letters, emails, and rallies. Though some concessions to the proposed education budget resulted from public outcry, austerity and the efficiency of education were underscored.

Nova Scotia's neoliberal education reform is not unprecedented. During the Common-sense Revolution in Ontario in the 1990s, widespread neoliberal education reforms ushered in robust efforts in centralizing, regulating, and reporting (Basu, 2004). Similarly in Nova Scotia, and still under PC leadership, *Learning for Life II: Bright Futures Together (Brighter Futures*) (Department of Education, 2005) published in 2005, marked the first public education document relating education and economics together – effectively marrying the public institution of schools with the neoliberal ideology hallmarks prioritizing free-markets, deregulation, and individual responsibility. *Brighter Futures* (Department of Education, 2005) extricated $22 million from the budget to education promising changes for "all students [to] graduate with the best possible preparation for their futures." By the end of the 2000s, Nova Scotia joined other provinces like Ontario, who were committed to neoliberal education reform roll outs under the same guise of improving student performance and efficiency. Indeed, "it did not seem to matter who was in power, education and competing globally were inextricably linked" (Frost, 2020). Raising the bar, later to be solemnized as the name of Dr. Glaze's 2018 report, finds its

roots in *Brighter Futures.* That is, in *Brighter Futures* (Department of Education, 2005), raising the bar refers to one of two objectives to improve student achievement, with the second purpose to close the gap in performance measures. Direct outcomes for more academically inclined students, like the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, were under the raise the bar objective. More hands-on approaches like skills and trades training for students was under the purview to close the gap (Rogers, 2018). *Brighter Futures* (Department of Education, 2005) marks the first education policy in Nova Scotia with a plan to meet varying student needs and interests to disrupt the standard practice implemented during the 1970s and 1980s (Frost, 2020). Importantly, *Brighter Futures* was instrumental in providing programs that gave individual autonomy in planning for educational trajectories (by students and parents alike).

Brighter Futures (Department of Education, 2005) ushered in many positive changes to the education system that were increasingly tenable as programs matured; however, the role of teachers was different under this policy since it increased the emphasis on numeracy and literacy – what Frost (2020) argues was "a move away from such holistic goals as building relationships with students to a more data driven model." As a result of this policy, since 2005 teachers have annual professional growth plans, subject to approval, and in some cases required change as determined by administration (Department of Education, 2005). At this time, the province moved away from teacher-developed marking systems to a province-wide school monitoring system that would create standardization no matter where one was located. The product, PowerSchool, was not introduced until 2010; however, both the annual teacher professional growth plans and province-wide school monitoring systems established the prerogatives espousing the economy and education as intangible.

Speaking to public perception, Frost (2020) shares how education changes largely garnered parent approval, "represent[ing] a subtle but solid change" where parents view of schools shifted to a "marketplace lens." For example, schools with IB programs were now equipped with the means to promote international accreditation under the terms of the

program. As such, parents opted for the school with the best chances for setting students for success when presented with a choice of schools, rather than values or student-teacher relations. The idea of choice in schooling is likely viewed as 'neutral' (or similar across schools), so performance measures like standardized testing or IB programs stand out for parents and guardians. Nova Scotia offered education solutions emphasizing choice. Less obvious, student accountability became intrinsically associated with education improvement. In addition, developments for implementation, often fell on teacher's responsibilities.

Standardization came through a new funding measure to be used by school boards. The Hogg Formula, named after former deputy minister of finance, Bill Hogg, was based on student enrolment (Glaze 2018, p. 8). The Hogg Formula served as a centralized way to efficiently dole out funds without considering individual needs of the student bodies varying across schools and regions. The Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) expressed frustration in their request for additional resources and funding for classroom supports, such as psychologists, guidance counsellors and resource teachers (Doucette, 2016). The inequitable funding was addressed in *Raise the Bar,* with the education minister in 2018 noting that the model is outdated (as cited in Laroche, 2018):

> We had a system in place that was resulting in student achievement levels being very different from region to region […] That tied us to a Hogg funding formula that resulted in supports for the diverse classroom being implemented very differently, to different levels of success.

Fundraising to supplement school funding received significant apprehension. Corfu (2018) argues the approach highlights inequality among schools due to the absence of standardized tracking to pinpoint dollars to ideas. Nonetheless, regional economic disparities reinforced school cultures as localized, since school catchment areas informed where students could attend schools based on their address. In this way, more affluent neighbourhoods had better opportunities to fundraise and provide better educational opportunities. The inherent issues with public schooling are seen as differences, but always

emerge notwithstanding any policy. One community member shared how “in a wealthier neighbourhood…more parents can afford to volunteer their time, they may have more connections to leverage when asking for donations, and they simply have more disposable income to contribute” (as cited in Corfu, 2018). In sum, not only was standardization of performance central to education, so too were funding formulas responsible for allocating resources and spending at schools. A student’s home address often directed the likelihood of supports and opportunities in school. Bussing does not fix the issue of class advantage, nor does it ameliorate the loss of a community. A simple solution is to fund schools properly and eliminate private or parent subsidies.

The following year, in 2006, the entire Halifax Regional School Board was dissolved by the Minister of Education, on account of “persistent performance issues” (Glaze 2018, p. 8). Media referred to the events as “constant bickering and fighting” (CBC News, 2011). In effect, the school board serving the largest student and teacher population in the province was replaced by a government appointee who held authority for two years until an established board was elected in 2008. In 2008, a second school board was disbanded for concern in heeding their mandate. The Strait Regional School Board was replaced with an appointee, akin to 2006. Following a problematic performance review requested by the board itself concerned of ‘back deals’ by some South Shore School Board members in attempt to save some rural schools from closing over others (CBC News, 2011). Such concerns were not unfounded; Deloitte’s report reads that, "we believe the likelihood of the current board as a collective entity transforming itself into a well-functioning board is low," citing how “substantial outside assistance” would not be enough help (as cited in CBC News, 2011). The obfuscated responsibilities of school boards marked the third school board in Nova Scotia disbanded in five years (Glaze, 2018). Formal actions underscore disorganization across multiple school boards, signalling varying degrees of educational responsibility across the province.

The New Democratic Party Leadership (2009 to 2013)

In 2009, Nova Scotia elected the New Democratic Party (NDP), under the leadership by Darrell Dexter. Though there were no major educational reforms during this time, Rogers (2018) reports how the ideology and policy already in place at the time befell advancement through expanding trades training and reinforcing the previous government ideology of public education (p. 85). Messages from previous decades remained steadfast to reinforce career skills, global marketplaces, and high 'earning potentials' (Rogers 2018, pp. 86-7). The shift signifies how educational values were upheld despite a lack of policy documents. As such, the Department demonstrated itself as "not neutral, and continued to connect career, earning potential, and workplace skills to education…" (Rogers 2018, p. 87). Between the three main parties governing Nova Scotia from the mid-1990s for the next two decades, all of Nova Scotia's political leadership parties, the PC's, Liberals, and NDP, continued to reason the purpose of public education as inextricable from the economy.

The initial outcry heralded by journalist Bob Murphy (2014) positioned the online program as a preferred avenue for teachers to receive license upgrades (as cited in Frost, 2020). One pre-approved course from Drake University in Iowa received particularly harsh criticism from the media, quickly targeting the course itself and, in turn, teachers' credibility. Drake University provided online courses available to complete at students' pace. Accordingly, it was ideally suited for teachers who were studying outside of school hours. The local institutions did not offer some courses that Drake University did, like physical education (Frost, 2020). Despite the approval of Drake's program from the department, Murphy sought to strengthen his assertion by educational consultant Paul Bennett (independent and not affiliated with the department). Bennett criticized the program as not rigorous enough, framing the programs as "not legitimate" and problematically accused teachers of "cherry-picking" easy courses of "maximum benefit" (as cited in Frost, 2020). Public outcry ensued.

Teachers were targeted for costing the province millions of dollars for these courses and upgrades instead of the more pressing issue of the Department approving the courses in the first place. In April 2014, the minister advised courses from Drake University were

no longer available to teachers after the Department reviewed the courses; however, teachers already enrolled could complete the program and receive the corresponding salary upgrade (Frost, 2020). Unfortunately, this was reneged and the pursual of professional development came at the common assumption it was driven by a desire for the corresponding salary increase. Above all, this harrowing time in 2014 to 2015 demonstrated the role of media in shaping public perception.

Coming from Ontario with a career in education during the Common-sense Revolution in 2002, Carole Olsen became new superintendent of Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB). Improvement to education was substantiated through data collection and the accountability measures to substantiate education reforms (Frost, 2020). Teachers were directed to use activities with measurable results, like literacy and numeracy, rather than personal development plans that could not as easily be gauged. *Horizons* and *Brighter Futures* were policy documents that explicitly called for accountability, as seen in Dr. Avis Glaze's 2018 report, *Raise the Bar.* This is to say: *Raise the Bar* did not bring substantially new accountability measures – many were found in policy documents of the 1990s (Frost, 2020). In fact, Rogers (2018) argues that between 1994 to 2016, "concerns with curriculum, accountability, testing, and competition surrounding the provincial economy appear in *all* education documents" (p. 69, emphasis in original).

The Liberal Leadership

Under the Liberal governance between 2013 to 2021, Nova Scotian's heard similar messages to those heralded during the previous leadership, linking student and economic performance symbiotically. In addition, concerns about school board operations continued. In 2014, the Minister suspects issues in the Tri-Country School Board serving rural south Nova Scotia (Glaze 2018, p. 9). Following recommendations from the provincial audit that disclosed problems, the appointed independent advisor, Jim Gunn, spends six months with the school board. Though not disbanded, school boards proved to be challenging to trust and rely on.

Occurring in tandem in 2014, former Lieutenant Governor Myra Freeman and her small team of less than ten were commissioned to evaluate the school system. Colloquially known as the 'Freeman Report,' Glaze (2018) asserts the publication as the "first major review of the school board system in 25 years" (Glaze 2018, p. 9). The Freeman Report, formally titled *Disrupting the Status Quo: Nova Scotians Demand a Better Future for Every Student* (*Status Quo*), based several recommendations for the Department based on participatory feedback and consultations. The suggestions in the Freeman Report provided the foundation for the Department's official response the following year, encapsulated in *3Rs: Renew, Refocus and Rebuild, Nova Scotia's Action Plan for Education* (*Action Plan*). In the first anniversary of the *Action Plan* in 2016, Minister Karen Casey emphasized the Department's commitment to "ensure curriculum is continuously updated and streamlined" (as cited in Education and Early Childhood Development, 2016). Reinforcing provincial outcomes with student "prepar[ation]" and "productive lives," the minister Casey affirmed the changes as necessary, since "Nova Scotia's future success depends on it" (as cited in Education and Early Childhood Development, 2016).

Despite the scope of the Freeman Report, Premier Stephen McNeil commissioned another study of the province's education in October 2017, this time by an independent consultant – Dr. Avis Glaze. According to Rogers (2018), there are four official documents led to this moment in the Premier's impetus (p. 89):

> …a report, Disrupting the Status Quo: Nova Scotians Demand a Better Future for Every Student, Report of the Minister's Panel on Education (2014), a policy, Nova Scotia's Action Plan for Education, The 3R's: Renew, Refocus, Rebuild (2015), another report, From School to Success: Clearing the Path, Report of the Transition Task Force (2016), and a discussion paper, Be There: Student Attendance and Achievement (2016).

Perhaps most tellingly, Rogers (2018) argues each document "…focused on the provincial economy and the role of education in shaping the future workforce, further concentrating the economic purposes of education in the province" (p. 89).

Many of the elements in the most significant education policy and documents leading up to 2018, when *Raise the Bar* was published, reflect common themes weaving common threads through the ideology guiding the policy and reform successions, including a commitment to student performance, and improving educational outcomes. Bill 72 is no different. In a swift turnaround of exactly one week since its introduction, Bill 72 enacted the "…sweeping legislation to reform the education system" (Gorman, 2018). The changes are profound, described by Gorman (2018) as:

> Among other things, the bill dissolves all elected English-language school boards, removes administrators from the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, creates an appointed advisory committee, and essentially places all accountability on the Education Department.

Praised by the education minister as "the next stage of evolution" serving to meet the "…[requirements] to be more responsive to the needs of our kids" (as cited in Gorman, 2018), the changes were emphatically marketed as progressive by the government. Elsewhere, the story differed. The teacher's union president Liette Doucet remarked that the priorities following Bill 72 center on the low morale among teachers, stating "it's going to take a long time to restore trust [by teachers to the government]" (as cited in Gorman, 2018). Other stakeholders also expressed concerns.

Although Premier McNeil's assured teachers would be involved in the implementation of the changes because of Bill 72, it was less clear how this would unfold. Specifically, Tory education critic Tim Halman conveyed concern about the gap of knowledge following the passing of Bill 72, (as cited in Gorman, 2018):

> There are a lot of questions about how these new governance structures are going to work […] I don't think the government has provided clarity as to how [school advisory councils] are going to work [and] how the new provincial advisory council is going to operate.

Other political pundits were uncertain about Bill 72's accountability. NDP education critic Claudia Chender argues that "closed-door meetings of a provincial advisory council" is problematic to replace elected school boards (as cited in Gorman, 2018). Chender's concern was dismissed by education minister Churchill, underscoring transparency for decisions and reasons. Over several years, seeds were planted and sowed to develop a "more robust performance management system" (Rogers, 2020).

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Stakeholders in education, from policymakers and administrators to teachers and school staff and community organizations, families, guardians, and students, have a vested interest in ensuring schools function well. The complexity arises not from a shared interest in education improvement but in the details of how and why developments take place. Provincial governments continue to entertain subsequent education reforms.

In her critical reflection, Rogers (2018) notes how media headlines mainly focus on the tensions between teachers and the department. At the same time, it is understood how the media fails to bring a broader scope demonstrating the complexity of the problems, where education reforms rarely see discussion outside of fragile relations at stake. To be clear: the belief for improvements in education is not unjust nor wrong. Instead, the focus derives by examining examine who neoliberal education reforms benefit and why.

Situating the significance of education reforms within a historical lens (Cui, 2017) aims to address the material conditions leading to the general acceptance for such widespread changes to occur. Connecting the 'how' is essential to understanding and examining 'why.' Such tactics looking at histories are not new. Likewise, emphasizing the importance of historical accounts is common in sociology and critical policy studies (Gale 2001, p. 383). Specifically, the analysis of historical constructs helps critical policy sociologists to "pull apart" policy – and implications – in generating an understanding of "whose interests they serve" (Gale 2001, p. 383).

The Responsibility of Education

Apple (2017) maintains schools' function less democratically, ultimately serving "to eliminate one of the most significant questions that should be asked in our schools: what and whose knowledge should we teach?" (p. 149). Although education reforms seek to improve schooling, the founding impetus for schools too often is pushed aside.

Standardization, performance, and efficiency speak to methods for delivering knowledge, not what constitutes information as acceptable. How governments adopt policy, from communication to legislation, can be where the contestation lies for citizens.

As a social policy analyst, Codd (2017) asserts the importance of the implications of neoliberal policies by understanding the interpretation by "rational social actors who respond to them from various social positions" (p. 32). The ideology of choice, deeply entrenched in neoliberalism education reforms, challenges if inclusive policies are meaningful or performative. The existing propensity between social actors and policy makers to guide decision making strategically. Codd (2017) advises policymakers "are disposed towards the interpretation of policies in terms of personal gains and losses or individual freedoms and constraints, rather than abstract principles of social justice" (p. 32) because of the reliance on social supports for some citizens – but not others. Policies with political support have the "the truth or falsehood of their propositions can only be known through direct experience of the consequences that follow from the practical solutions they generate" (Codd 2017, p. 33). Perhaps it best to draw attention to the experience of decision makers inclined to maintain their power and status in any means necessary.

McMahon (2007) argues schools mirror the society they belong to – economically, politically, and ideologically – as accessible knowledge gatekeepers (p. 684). As such, this leads to the normalization and ideological endorsement of "white, middle class, male, heterosexual experiences and world-views" that "exacerbate the injustices of the larger society" (McMahon 2007, p. 684). Studies of inequity at all levels of education tend to agree. Ryan (2003) reveals how principals lead in schools with changing racial demographics in his four-year inquiry. Echoing McMahon's assertion, Ryan (2003) argues that results showed that principals hold identities that give "comparatively elite positions" to these leadership roles afforded by the system (p. 160). As such, principals approaching change of the system, the same of which they belong to that has "bequeathed to them skills, attitudes and knowledge" that, in addition, holds "procedures, practices and processes that provides

[principals] with their current identity and the means of making a good living" (Ryan 2003, p. 160). Leander (2015) contributes to the discussion through their theory on neoliberal curriculum for students to receive accountability and rationality skills in a standardized approach (as cited in Taylor, 2020). Consequently, social interactions become machine-like by automating means (or support) to approach individual situations. Evidence concerned with schools as knowledge gatekeepers disclose research bolstering the need for an education system to be meaningfully inclusive. As such, performativity of inclusion renders 'othering' for people who work best outside of curriculum and standardized approaches. For people in this category, advocacy, and confidence to seek out alternative or supplemental opportunities is often outside of the education system (such as tutoring), marking a failure of equitable learning outcomes.

Similarly, the study examining education conclusions by Galway & Sheppard (2015) empirically demonstrates a tangible dissonance between education practitioners and researchers that makes "decision-making is ambiguous and risky" (p. 30). De Lissovoy (2013, 2015) analyzes neoliberalism in classrooms, arguing that teachers who are complicit in the guiding principles do so as a job requirement, with little room to deviate from curriculum (as cited in Taylor, 2020). The premise for teachers is through a different set of neoliberal tenets "in their classrooms through mandated curriculum, administrative surveillance, and high-stakes accountability measures" (De Lissovoy 2013, 2015, as cited in Taylor 2020, p. 7). Accordingly, a standardized curriculum offers a one-size-fits-all approach to student-teacher interaction. When students need varying strategies to cultivate their learning and development, teachers cannot do so. Curriculum mandates required rigidity of teachers, significantly impeding learning for students with needs outside of standardization. In this instance, a zero-sum scenario under neoliberal education policy, a teacher is not empowered to meet differing student needs outside of the curriculum; meanwhile, students encounter frustrations with not receiving the help needed (Taylor, 2020). The way neoliberal education principles guide pedagogy and the lived experience of students and teachers can often be unaccounted for by policymakers who are not teachers themselves (Galway & Sheppard, 2015).

Moreover, policymakers are not immune to life's stressors, particularly in uncertain times. In neoliberal education reforms, policies are often developed and legitimized in times of crisis (Chomsky & Waterstone, 2021). Understandably, the familiar knowledge often from the local community informs decisions through the policymaker's sense-making (Galway & Sheppard, 2015). If the objective of inclusive education policy is to advance equity, policymakers must recognize when the community is in need, without residents necessarily being able to say so directly.

Democratic education, as Giroux (2013) and Apple (2017) vie for, makes room for multiple perspectives. Without an internal platform, mass media, social media, and everyday conversations are ways citizens commonly make sense of education. It's a way to bring the macro to the micro. Undoubtedly, concerned voices sharing perspectives that debate the value of and considerations for education are necessary for schools to reflect the larger society. Critically conscious citizens challenge this very structure. For example, McCracken & Rogers (2021) pled for public attention as Manitoba's probable adoption of education reforms – spearheaded by Dr. Avis Glaze nonetheless – urging citizens to see Nova Scotia's trajectory as a "cautionary tale." Giroux (2013) points to citizen collusion required for neoliberal education reforms, a distinct move away from democracies that need informed citizens and spaces to think critically and act (p. 23).

Neoliberal Optics: Leveraging Mistrust

Student success envisioned by Dr. Avis Glaze (2018) postulates youth as "future national and global leaders" (p. 3). While wrapped in promise, such statements are guised in the (re)produced inequality. Such sentiments serve as an intentional tactic aimed to carry out vital principles of neoliberal ideology, "often reproduc[ing] oppression, with unconscious 'oppressors' reproducing the status quo" (Rodd & Sanders 2018, p. 27). The significance hinges on the intent for changes. Though written in terms elucidating

inclusion, the purpose is covert: those who thrive in neoliberal systems are typically white, middle and upper-class folks (Apple, 2001; Giroux, 2013). Left to the wayside are students outside of this socioeconomic strata. Ambrosio (2013) affirms how "the neoliberal state withdraws from the provision of public services," meaning that individuals are "made responsible for managing personal financial risk" (p. 321). That is, the difference between written policy and lived experience reveals how neoliberalism (re)produces inequities by devolving state regulation and controls meant to protect citizens. In favour of free-market systems, education reform is tightly concerted alongside principles of centralizing curricula (Ambrosio, 2013), standardization (Sjøberg, 2019), and efficiency (Apple, 2001). As Ball (2016) reveals, the power and influence of a small group is responsible for most of this decision making (pp. 1047-8):

> …the processes of neoliberal reform are legitimated, disseminated, sometimes enforced and indeed sometimes 'sold', by a set of very powerful and very persuasive agents and organisations, including the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, International Finance Corporation, European Union (EU) (e.g. EU benchmarks are subtle sets of key effective levels for change and standardization), and a plethora of market-leaning Think-Tanks (e.g. Freedom Institute – now defunct), consultancies and policy entrepreneurs.

Thus, establishing neoliberal reforms as not existing in a vacuum is profound to highlight power imbalances. Responsibility in the eyes of the organizations mentioned in the quote is a significant part of neoliberal reforms. Peck & Tickell (2002) write to the premise of neoliberal reforms through the many overlapping and interrelated factions, stating how "their simultaneous rise [extends] across a wide range of national, political and institutional contexts" (pp. 395-6). In a Canadian study of education policymakers, findings by Galway & Sheppard (2015) reveal significant influence by both macro and micro-level factors, "where choice of policy evidence is mediated by personal considerations and political risk factors" (p. 2). They affirm structural concerns when "a weak policy development paradigm … is resistant to independent research-informed evidence" (Galway & Sheppard 2015, p. 2). Likewise, education advocate and scholar Michael Apple (2001)

agrees, arguing neoliberal education reforms lack research to back their claims (p. 412); instead, the dangling carrot offers the illusion of hope through tangible testing scores and robust surveillance systems to monitor, track, and assess student development.

The idea of governments to learn of 'what works' seems relatively unassuming, given evidence-based decision making is a reasonable standard to maintain. Yet, leveraging a concept known as 'PISA envy' by Pat Thomson and her colleagues, Ball (2016) states how student scores are a "powerful lever for change" (p. 1048). That is, student scores on PISA tests are not just for individual benefit; rather, the scores are used to garner support for future reforms. The performance in PISA offers test scores (read: evidence) on a platter. A 'policy window' is created through PISA results to justify policy (that otherwise may seem outlandish). In turn, the attention and support sought can be rooted in 'evidence'.

Neoliberalism, deeply vested in the vitality of the economy (primarily through regulation and privatization), creates agendas to accentuate a spectrum between macro processes (for example, valuing competition in global markets) and micro-processes (such as minimum wage and labour conditions that affect citizen's lived experiences) (Peck & Tickell, 2002). Both macro and micro analyses are significant in sociology; however, policy sociology brings both together as "*inseparable*" (Rogers 2018, p. 24, emphasis in original). Notions of common-sense blur lines on how hegemonic projects take shape. Strategically, "by the rulers promulgating and constantly reinforcing a particular common sense about the world, not only is the way they are operating the way the world is, but it's the way the world should be" (Chomsky & Waterstone, 2021). The shifts in common-sense unfold in a way that discretely shape how people make sense of the world around them. In doing so, reform proposals (like *Raise the Bar*) are specifically produced with this in mind because it would not be palatable otherwise.

Education reform is symbiotic between public and private, like provincial curriculum guiding student learning. Ball (2016) notes how neoliberal education reforms do not replace existing policy in entirety, rather add to policy in place, where the micro processes

– teachers and schools – are "left to resolve the resulting contradictions between the old and the new within their situated practice." Hegemonic projects never come to full fruition. They are not unrolled in a unilateral fashion, either. Only through altering can the conditions ripen. That is, legitimacy is gained when people believe the rulers are acting in the best interest of the people (Chomsky & Waterstone, 2021).

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1986) articulates the relationship between common-sense and power (as cited in Chomsky & Waterstone, 2021):

> Why then is common sense so important? Because it is a terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness of the masses of the people is actually formed. It is the already formed and taken for granted terrain on which more coherent ideologies and philosophies must contend for mastery, the ground which new conceptions of the world must take into account, contest and transform if they were to shape the conceptions of the world of the masses and in that way become historically effective.

Dialogue required for meaningful social change cannot happen without hearing from different perspectives and varying intersections. For example, it is revealed in the study completed by the advocacy group Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia, that many teachers feel they are shouldering the policy implementation, and with little support at that. Gathering feedback from an online survey, the majority of responses confirmed how teachers are facing mounting frustrating with decreasing support (ESJNS, 2019). Some accolades in *Raise the Bar* were given, such as "caps on class sizes, where implemented, were helpful" (ESJNS 2019, p. 9). Most responses suggested otherwise. One participant response laments the frustration and exhaustion felt by teachers left to implement neoliberal education reforms (ESJNS 2019, p. 13):

> Teachers are tired, bone-tired of feeling overworked and under-appreciated. NS still seems to want schools to 'fix' every issue with children aged 4–19 but we are not given the supports or resources to do so. The people who are making major decisions that impact my day-to-day classroom reality have no idea of what that reality is, or how their choices will impact it.

Unequivocally, teachers and school staff are vitally important in shaping and transforming students' lives. Within this, structural limitations exist because policy, as an extension of the state, organizes social and hierarchical constructs at school. Accordingly, education policy has a far-reaching impact, much further than the physical boundaries of classrooms and schools. Thus, the emphasis on how curriculum and teaching are critical to identifying state priorities in student learning – connecting the macro process with its counterpart, micro processes. The students are left to teachers, both facing minimal supports, especially for any situation requiring additional needs and attention. One participant response from the survey by Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia encapsulates how teacher skills are squandered to the design of the system, yet also negatively represented in media (ESJNS 2019, p. 24):

> It takes incredible motivation and stamina to strive for excellence against all impediments and barriers, personal sacrifices and exhaustion. McNeil and his policies—along with teacher bashing in the media—have seriously damaged my motivation and energy. Instead of striving for excellence I may be settling for adequate. How does that help students?

The teacher recognizes students and teachers are both victims to a system that is designed for them though it is not in their best interest. Here, the idea of common-sense diverges. While data to support policy directions seems well-intentioned, what is missing is dialogue from students and teachers who are most impacted by policy implications. Indeed, teaching and learning are impacted by policy rooted in "the manner in which success and quality are socially constructed, so that private is seen as superior to public" (Gale de Saxe et al 2020, p. 54). Ball (2016) affirms that "small, incremental moves and tactics, a ratchet of initiatives and programs….make further moves thinkable and doable," furthermore stating how

"things at one time seemed unthinkable become over time the common sense and the obvious policy, as 'what works' and as 'best practice'" (p. 1048). To summarize, students have varying learning goals and outcomes, to which the education system should support. The intended outcomes in using standardized scores and expeditious research initiatives do not reflect the needs of students and teachers in classrooms. Research demonstrates how policy is justified and rolled out in a detrimental way. Though some students will thrive in these environments, the students who face oppressive conditions that do not meet their individual objectives or needs are now subjects of a compounding problem.

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Relatedly, Taylor (2020) argues that learning in a neoliberal framework is not a process of improvement; instead, it is "the completion of a regulated set of tasks that produce a set of predetermined outcomes, typically framed as standards" (p. 2). In addition, curriculum frameworks based on testing and performance renders student success within terms of comparison to other students, meaning collaboration is entirely missing. Students are pitted against each other, the same way teachers are in performance evaluations, and schools against schools for whose results are best. A shared vision is obfuscated on multiple levels. Significantly, Taylor points to standardization as propelling competition from teachers and students to become noticeable within accountability systems.

A Critical Policy Analysis of *Raise the Bar*

Neoliberal states carefully articulate promises rooted in standardization, performance, measurable outcomes, and accountability in a strategic approach. Taken out of context, such objectives are rather admirable. Neoliberal projects seek the best way to maximize production in a capitalist workplace, which does not adequately reach the root of the social and economic inequities that affect education outcomes. Education reform prerogatives seem inclusive, with concepts emphasizing responsibility and improvement, but examining the context of who benefits illuminates a telling narrative unbeknownst to many people.

Employing the idea of absent presences in a neoliberal education rollout suggests otherwise. For instance, consider the promises by education reforms like Nova Scotia's *Action Plan* (2015), like the Department identifying gaps in student needs to timely and accessible services for physical and mental well-being (p. 16). The calls for more support were underscored in *Raise the Bar*, too. In addition, in Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia, the teacher feedback survey shared multiple teacher perspectives stating how the lack of adequate mental and physical supports for students means additional barriers for students – and pressures for teachers to try to create inclusive learning spaces without the helpful means to do so. Inclusion appears to be a buzz word, a sure-fire way to secure wider reception; however, the notion of inclusive learning spaces amongst the pillars in neoliberal education reform rollouts – like centralization, standardization, and efficiency – may be performative instead of genuine. Nonetheless, this example is not in isolation. Many of the recommendations in education reforms recycle the same premise for reform (Bennett, 2018; Rogers, 2018). Examining the failed assurances from education reform platforms certainly calls into question why another education reform rollout would reasonably be the next course of action, especially within two years (as was the case in commissioning Dr. Glaze in October 2017).

Considering absent presences attempts to reveal the subtle or less obvious information directly in policy. It can also come in the form of the understandings that *inform* policymaking (in this case, education reform). Absent presences, often deliberately arranged, excludes certain information that upon discovering, functions to inform of the

state position on a topic through considering what is not concretely addressed, said, or accounted for otherwise. Take education reforms, for example; they will never be labelled as neoliberal (to do so is not complimentary to gaining support, after all). The seminal work by David Harvey (2005) argues that neoliberal theory seeks to emphasize "strong individual private property rights, the rule of law, and the institutions of freely functioning markets and free trade." In education, the neoliberal education reform rollouts are argued by Ball (2016) as producing a new kind of policy subjects. The complicity required for reforms is tactfully constructed to provide one response: full steam ahead. Ball (2016) argues (p. 1050):

> They enable us to do things differently, they create new roles and opportunities, the possibility of excellence, of improvement, of choice, of autonomy, of innovation. They recruit us as enthusiasts, but if we hesitate or demur then they quickly position us as unprofessional or irrational or archaic. They rework the meaning of professionalism, making it into a different thing. Professionalism becomes defined in terms of skills and competences, which have the potential for being measured, and rewarded, rather than a form of reflection, a relationship between principles and judgment. The 'new' professional is flexible and adept in the languages of reform.

Hence, deliberating about absent presences is an ideal practice in critical analysis to examine bias through omission. No policy is free of absent presences.

Analyzing power relations across time and space reveals how public trust is both gained and lost. Rogers (2018) rightly argues that relations between policy and practice hold "tenuous details [that] are highly changeable, dependent on the historical period, school context, and political climate" (p. 11). As critical policy sociology invites an environmental scan of relevant sociohistories to make sense of the conditions leading up to the moment in time. Examining the power schema must occur "with(in) the interplay of individual and total overall relations" (Rogers 2018, p. 14). Put simply, spectrums of power do not exist outside of multiple relations and conditions. Such conditions necessitate opportunities that decision-makers leverage to employ to strategically naturalize the need for reform.

As Peck & Tickell (2002) candidly elucidate, "one of neoliberalism's real strengths has been its capacity to capitalize on such conditions [of persistent vulnerability to regulatory crises and market failures]" (p. 392). In short, education reform can successfully capitalize on mounting uncertainty and chaos – even if not believed, public consent can come from rhetoric (generally) perceived as authentic – providing ripe conditions for neoliberalism to take shape in its many forms. For this reason – and the fact that education is a place to develop "rigorous questioning" of dominant institutions – Apple (2001) argues the conversations "must deeply involve those who benefit least from the ways these institutions now function" (p. 416). Too often, the opportunity for dialogue the way Apple suggests is limited for a wider audience or captures voices of oppressed people but in a private way.

Strategizing Education Reform as "Natural"

A significant public debate challenging education reform can be seen in Ontario during the Common-sense Revolution under the Harris government in the late 1990s. In examining the agenda and implications during this time, Basu (2004) notes how the Ontario government carefully strategized the proposed restructuring, leading to its successful implementation (p. 622). She maintains that education reforms are a strategic response that hinges on the perceived need to respond to an increasingly global and capitalist world. Notably, Glaze (2018), brings in many neoliberal hallmarks in *Raise the Bar*, such as her proclamation for students "into the national and global leaders they must become" (p. 3). Three neoliberal principles in the public sector are delineated by Basu (2004) as individualism, privatization, and decentralization (p. 622). These same principles continue to apply in neoliberal education reforms in other spaces since – like Nova Scotia – just twenty years after Ontario's initiation. The parallels in neoliberal education reform rollouts substantiate a familiar set of guiding principles, much akin to Harvey's assertion; education policy developed based on the neoliberal cornerstones of efficiency, austerity, standardization, and self-responsibility.

In *America's Education Deficit and the War on Youth*, Giroux (2013) argues "neutral, objective education is an oxymoron," affirming that "education cannot exist outside of relations of power, values, and politics" (p. 143). Giroux (2013) conceptualizes education deficit, referring to the "growing and political and cultural illiteracy" (p. 23). That is, the problem is more than individual; it is a product of curated state messaging. Marketing and communication efforts are direct responses to the subtle shifts in common-sense that result from neoliberal rollouts. According to Giroux (2013), education deficits are gross simplifications of the critical consciousness required to understand civics, lacking reflexivity, objectivity, and understanding of the interrelationships between personal and public issues. Rooted in the idea that "consumerism is the essence of citizenship," Giroux (2013) argues how more fundamental concerns are left wayside (p. 137). Apple's seminal question on the role of schools continues to be profound.

A central component of knowledge is language. Words, both spoken and unspoken, curate ideas, concepts, and narratives that carry ideas forward. The educational reform documents preceding Glaze's report, such as *Status Quo* (2014), assert the relation between student performance and the provincial economy. Public support is required for neoliberal education reforms to proceed, so typically the documents highlight the need for reform from the outset by presenting the problem right away. At the same time, research indicates how garnering public support is not always sincere. Education scholar Henry Giroux (2013) maintains suspicion in the ways that dialogue and critical analysis "become[s] the ideological corollary" (p. 56). For instance, the opening letter of *Status Quo* (2014), written by the Chair of the Ministers Panel on Education, the Honourable Myra Freeman, reflects on a table displaying on overall satisfaction with the public school system (p. 2):

> We believe this statistic is not acceptable. A high-quality education system is too important to the children and youth, communities and economy of the province. There is clearly a need for change.

The entire report hinges on gaining public confidence in recommendations from the report, asserted as "suggestions from Nova Scotians" (*Status Quo* 2014, p. 2). Less clear, the suggestions derive from participant responses to research conducted by the Minister's Panel. Without a doubt, Ambrosio (2013) asserts such change is to "appear as necessary and self-evident" (p. 327). To do so, the idea of reform appears multiple times, reinforcing a 'necessary' and 'self-evident' solution in recommendations. Located in the opening letter, Freeman stresses a "significant change" in educational governance, now bringing in emotion to substantiate the need for education reform (*Status Quo* 2014, p. 3):

> There is no other choice. The assessment results of Nova Scotian students reveal that our students are not performing well in comparison to other provinces. Given that our youth need to succeed in a competitive world, this is deeply disturbing.

Note how the position warranting education reform takes place. First, the 'need for change' was substantiated by feedback from local research. Second, student performance results set a tone reinforcing a natural approach to reform. Together, it appears as both the public and students would benefit from education reform rollouts. The same approach is recapitulated by Glaze in *Raise the Bar.* Performance measures provide data to be used in justifying education reform rollouts. This has been done consistently in recent education reform documents.

In describing neoliberal tactics, Ball (2016) asserts that "… once established, make further moves thinkable and doable, and ultimately make them obvious and indeed necessary" (p. 1048). As Ball argues, the sweeping changes would be too much at once without a phased approach, the latter which invites the possibility of halting the implementation more than an all at once approach. Hence, education reform roll outs require public support in order to proceed. Indeed, gradual changes benefit a tendency to be more palatable, and more importantly, build a type of stacking momentum that continues to reaffirm its vitality and necessity. The language of reform is profound to hearten Ball's claim. He argues how "mundane and practice changes in our everyday practices" (Ball 2016, p. 1050), where through policy both changes and language change. It

requires a new way of conceptualizing, categorizing, and organizing our sense-making based on incremental changes so as to imbue social fabric with neoliberal rhetoric.

Importantly, there is no doubt that the language people use to connect their ideas and opinions to the social world is an incredulous way for neoliberal education reforms to appear as natural. That is, if people speak neoliberal terminology and understand the system through neoliberal rhetoric, the only way to move through challenges is to address the system in the same language. As students and stakeholders continue to participate in schools among years of changes, inevitably their sense-making of the same systems will change, too. The pitting of students against students, teachers against teachers, and schools against schools, through data collection to aggregate results, renders ways to distinguish difference and, accordingly, claim place within a ranking system. In this way, the terminology to understand one's location in the system is often framed within competition, ranking, and standards. The changing relations between the state and teachers are the result of persistent and incremental changes. Accordingly, Ball (2016) passionately affirms "…they make further changes thinkable!" (p. 1052).

Basu (2004) examines the historical context leading to the education reform, during the Common-sense Revolution, notes a socio-politically tense period in Ontario. Basu (2004) shares how the idea of a crisis was built upon over time, ultimately lending public perception to believe a "perceived need" justifying significant education system "structural readjustments" (p. 621). In the case of both Ontario and Nova Scotia, neoliberal reform agendas promoted proposed changes as taking beneficial, even as far as taking accountability for current needs. Indeed, the basic premise of education reform is to improve schooling. "Socially just" is often interrelated with the acceptance of education reforms, according to Gale de Saxe et al (2020, p. 52). A description could not be further from the truth and heralds the naturalization neoliberalism strategizes (which is, of course, anything but natural). Specifically, Gale de Saxe et al (2020) maintain that public education reforms cause harm (p. 52):

> …in reality they actually serve to reinforce a patriarchal, capitalist, and racist society that implicitly sees teaching and learning as a means to reproduce inequities, instead of regarding it as a high-caliber profession that has the potential to contribute to a more equitable, just, and democratic society.

In Nova Scotia, Rogers's (2018) research in Nova Scotia augments Giroux's deficit hysteria theory as locally relevant, pointing it specifically as the driver of recent policy changes that weaves the importance of education and economy together (p. 102). Standardized tests can be seen as putting limitations on student capacity to be their true selves (Taylor, 2020). Such findings emphasize the relevance of liberation as Freire (2018) is an action and a reflection – a conscious process moving through, and out of, oppression. Authentic liberation is transformation embodied. In the pursuit of liberation by the oppressed, a state approach to carefully communicated messages to the masses. The media, as an incredibly influential platform to share, is weighed in favour of the ruling class. To do so, the official media presence is used when complimentary to the Department mission almost always, unless responding to a crisis's moment. This way, by planning how and when to share information, it can be moulded in the right ways so as to factually present the information through creative analysis.

Challenges for public engagement are not unheard of in neoliberal projects. A central means to promulgate efforts relies heavily on positive media coverage of executive-level decision makers and the most favourable outcomes. Put another way – while the ruling class can control image, the working class has less means to do so. It is an ongoing buffer in effort to maintain positive image in the public. Baltodano (2012) highlights concern for the dwindling public spheres under neoliberalism – the spaces to engage in debate and consider social values and principles, much like Giroux (2013) who maintains public spaces as "ruled by fear" (p. 56). We fail to move past education deficits if we do not embark on framing education as "a form of political intervention in the world that is capable of creating the possibilities for social transformation" (Giroux 2013, p. 140). It is the true essence of Freire's theory of liberation.

The research findings emphasize experience as a key to learning while highlighting the need for action as part of the learning cycle (Brown, 2004). The importance of experience and participation to learn provides a foundation students can draw from to make sense of the world. Indeed, actions speak louder than words. It is essential to understand that, for the most part, we are products of the education system. Without encouragement to act on knowledge – particularly outside of economic value – it simply is not in our social fabric to initiate meaningful social action. Slater (2020) effectively articulates the power found through deeper understandings from "the communities most egregiously violated by market reforms" arguing that "it is in these spaces where we often find the most astute tactics and radical rejections of failed policies" (p. 74). That is, absent presences warrant action to challenge neoliberal ideological legitimacy. Oppressed communities advocating for change, according to Slater, provide powerful demonstrations fighting for developing educational alternatives. The work is important to recognize the obstacles we face in disrupting the status quo, particularly as people represent the products of social constructs.

Uneven Power and the Widening of the Inequality Gap

Critical scholar and educational activist David Stovall refers to "politics of desperation" in describing impacts of neoliberal education reforms on marginalized communities (as cited in Slater 2020, p. 83). Disinvestment and abandonment are worsening conditions commonplace in what Stovall situates as "racially and economically marginalized groups facing uncertainty in education and housing" (as cited in Slater 2020, p. 83).

In Halifax, inequities between regions can be seen in fundraising, a supplement to provincial funding. A retired principal from Halifax, Alyson Hillier reflects on her 45-year career, describes the vast fundraising opportunities between schools only a few kilometres apart as "disturbing" (Corfu, 2018). Hillier emphasizes how schools in wealthier communities are in a better position to fundraise, with more disposable resources like time and money to directly invest in initiatives. Students are aware of opportunities afforded at

some schools and not at others, since funding for enrichment is given to all schools in Halifax in a standardized format of $5,000 plus $1 for every student (Corfu, 2018). Inequities are reproduced through this financing that discounts how some students rely on supports in schools, like breakfast programs. The spectrum of fundraising ranges from an average of $66.60 per student on the low end, compared to $364.79 per student, during the same year, at a school in the wealthy South end neighbourhood (Corfu, 2018). The dollars per student reflects additional resources through the support of the community, directly correlating economic viability of regions with the schools belonging in the catchment area. Accordingly, we must examine how neoliberal education reform rollouts buttress intersectional forms of oppression (Gale de Saxe et al. 2020, p. 52).

In examining the role of identity, Bialystok (2020) attributes the 'politics of recognition' as central tenet in neoliberalism for people to make sense of adapting realities (p. 157). Notably, the politics of recognition is vitally crucial concerning identities whereby the sense of self –identity – is "a short-hand for making decisions about the re-distribution of rewards and opportunities" (Bialystok 2020, p. 157). Positions of power in schools, like principals, educational administrators, and educators, hold authority in the day-to-day decision-making processes. Within this, limitations exist to varying degrees that challenge leaders' identities, commitments, and pedagogies, such as school or district protocols people in positions of power must oblige with. The vocabulary associated with these subtle shifts includes practice, new roles and new titles, annual reviews, evaluations, output indicators, and templates (Ball 2016, p. 1050). Although we must consider new ways to learn and organize our work, such processes "also compare us, classify us and divide us; they value and reward and discipline and sanction" (Ball 2016, p. 1050).

The social reproduction of inequality occurs in public institutions, like schools. At first glance, it is reasonably unclear how deeply embedded the economy is to informing education policy. Even at the most basic level, measurable outcomes to trace student development mimics performance evaluations in the workplace. Specifically, promoting student outcomes covertly directs in the reality of surveillance culture, which must not be

downplayed. Ozga (2008) conceptualizes the accountability and performative surveillant culture as 'governing by numbers' and results in 'governing knowledge' (p. 264). Students are known less by the ideas and skills and more by the number attached to their results. Ball (2016) contends how this reductionism transmutes student identity to a number – a score – *quantity*. Olssen (2006) firmly positions record keeping as devolving responsibility for educational outcomes from government and administration to the student.

Hinging on personal accountability in a free-market education system, "the discourse of autonomous and independent individuals who are responsible for updating their skills in order to achieve their place in society" (Olssen 2006, p. 224). Ladson-Billings (1995) argues for a culturally relevant pedagogy, where students who come to school with knowledge from lived experiences is not dismissed as irrelevant or unnecessary. In culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers complement students existing knowledge recognizing that cultural norms, understandings, and ideas need not be explicitly within regional understandings. That is, folks from a diverse array of backgrounds are not dismissed for the knowledge acquired at home and in communities that are otherwise different from typical Western approaches.

By acknowledging and working with all knowledges, it is impossible to work within neoliberal education systems because the capacity to measure student performance is obfuscated in culturally relevant pedagogy. In accountability and performative education systems, measurable quantity often requires contorting knowledge to (re)produce expectations. In doing so, the status quo is maintained, at the cost of cultural erosion and limiting understandings of acceptable knowledge. Though abhorrently untrue, to be outside of acceptable standards renders one as unproductive or irresponsible in neoliberal education regimes (Ball, 2016). Acceptance as captured in measurable outcomes comes at the cost of dismissing any educational activities or practices that are unlikely to positively impact performance. Too often, valuable knowledge outside of education is not recognized within education, dismissing other forms and cultural knowledge. Ball (2016) notes how students and teachers alike have a "growing sense of ontological insecurity," (p. 1054)

where a loss of meaning and importance in day-to-day activities is subsumed within neoliberal priorities that wrongly assume innate satisfaction accompanying high performance.

Ozga (2008) maintains neoliberal mechanisms in external regulation act as 'political technologies,' putting the state in a comfortable arms-length position while individuals and organizations must develop their own capacity and agency accountable to standardized data collection and performance measures. From a critical race perspective, Sleeter (1993) argued that "[w]hites so internalize their own power and taken-for-granted superiority that they resist self-questioning'" (as cited in Cui 2017, p. 1162). In agreement, Corbett (2008) notes that to his knowledge, standardized testing scores lack understanding in terms of social class composition, an important consideration given the regional nature of education in Canada. Corbett (2008) questions if outcome variables in standardized testing, such as graduation rates, student body makeup of science courses (the most heavily tested), employment rates in marginalized communities, and so on, would reveal tangible implications of performativity (p. 374).

At the same time, the work of Sjøberg highlights the problematic nature of neoliberal standardization and accountability that seemingly renders impervious to people and organizations responsible for the standardization of knowledge and success. Ball (2016) argues how the state's emphasis in student performances results in "quality [that] is all too often expressed as productivity" (p. 1053). To be seen as productive, students must ensure their schoolwork aligns with markers of performance. Effort, values, purposes, and self-understanding must fit within the purview of student expectations, without room for negotiation or reconsideration (Ball, 2016). Without adequate output, student achievement will not be recognized as acceptable within neoliberal education systems. Finally, situating this fact in a global context, we must vocalize concerns specific to the sheer power held by people and organizations like Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). They provide no reliable recourse for democratic participation beyond their own vision. In this sense, Peck & Tickell (2002) are exactly right in their call to action to

examine the "different processes of neoliberalization," both theoretically and empirically (p. 382). Indeed, to do so deepens understanding of which neoliberal ideologies are (re)produced through institutions and political action, "since 'actually existing' neoliberalism's are always (in some way or another) hybrid or composite structures" (Peck & Tickell 2002, p. 382). Of course, this could not be condoned by the enterprises suggested.

Developing critical awareness skills in young people is necessary to illuminate disparities is most likely possible outside of schools. Put differently, Apple (2017) argues that common sense about education is constantly altered as a result of particular groups holding power and influence who can create policies to benefit themselves whilst convincing people of their place in society. More specifically, Slater (2020) crystallizes the extent of damage to marginalized communities at the helm of neoliberal reform pundits. Exploited people are inadequately represented in "damage-centred research" often portraying one-dimensional characterizations. Still, "those who are regularly exposed to the most destructive forces of exploitation, exclusion, and violation" are in this position partly because of "inflict[ed] flagrant social injuries" where entire "communities whose struggles for educational justice have long been obstructed" (Slater 2020, p. 73). Despite claims as socially just, neoliberal reforms are anything but. Gale de Saxe et al. (2020) bluntly affirms (p. 52):

> …in reality they actually serve to reinforce a patriarchal, capitalist, and racist society that implicitly sees teaching and learning as a means to reproduce inequities, instead of regarding it as a high-caliber profession that has the potential to contribute to a more equitable, just, and democratic society.

Likewise, Giroux (2013) notes the role of education as an everyday commitment possibility to bring democratic political culture back into the social fabric. Chomsky and Waterstone (2021) discuss the relationship between common sense and power in their published work, *Consequences of Capitalism*. Their argument examines the individual compass each person uses to understand how the world works. The premise is rooted in Gramsci's concept of hegemony, where the capacity to convince people in changing people's beliefs of

"how the world operates become predominant is a very potent form of political power" (Chomsky and Waterstone, 2021). For the many folks facing the brunt of inequity – be it the throes of systemic racism, gender binaries, poverty, and so on – appealing to this social group's common sense is to provide hope for better opportunities to 'level the playing field.'

Connell (2011) maintains social class as "never explicitly acknowledged" wherein "the market model is [assumed to be] universally applicable." Hannah Arendt's work similarly argues how it is not a question of the common sense itself, but the ways we do so are under direct attack (as cited in Chomsky and Waterstone, 2021). The uncovering of this discourse is conceptualized by Apple (2012) as 'relational analyses,' describing social activity (including education as a form) as embedded within a larger network of institutions. Significantly, these very institutions "apportion resources so that particular groups and classes have historically been helped while others have been less adequately treated" (Apple 2012, p. 26). The distribution and dissemination of resources by the state, including knowledge, is important to discern what is considered legitimate information according to the Department and policy makers.

A vocal critic of neoliberal education reforms, Giroux (2013) argues the ongoing nature is possible because of an endorsement by a "society that refuses to view children as a social investment" (p. 152). Instead, students are seen as economic products to groom for future benefits to labour and the economy. Glaze (2018, p. 3) shares a firm belief "that Nova Scotia's education system must have students at the centre;" however, preliminary results from the provincial education study indicate students are not the recipients of focus (Whitley and Hollweck, 2020). Apple (2012) argues similarly, affirming that "in practice neo-liberal policies involving market 'solutions' may actually serve to reproduce—not subvert— traditional hierarchies of class and race" (p. 413). The nexus of critiques recognizes the reifying of socioeconomic class formations.

Giroux (2013) maintains that schools can become a central figure in developing the skills required for critical consciousness; moreover, the focus of importance amplifies when socio-economic inequality widens under political authoritarianism and cultural austerity. Critical consciousness cannot derive from audit and surveillance culture, neoliberal cornerstones of alleged accountability. The dissonance between policy and implementation reveals shortcomings to leverage evidence for concern in public education debates. Indeed, considering how transformation can be misrepresented as common-sense undoubtedly requires further attention.

Performing for Who? Shifting State Responsibility to Students

Making a crisis moment is a deliberate neoliberal tactic (Giroux, 2013; Basu, 2004; Apple, 2017; Peck & Tickell, 2002). Ball (2016) contributes to the conversation considering the how technology and education reform work to naturalize need and consent through "mundane and practical changes in our everyday practices" (p. 1050).

The education reforms recently employ this strategy through performativity. Broadfoot (2000) refers to performance as an apparatus to define knowledge, values, and behaviours with tangible and measurable outcomes (as cited in Apple 2001, p. 426). Understanding neoliberal education reform is anything but a natural or neutral phenomenon, Rogers (2020) pertinently argues that testing scores do more than evaluate students. Given the accentuated importance of student evaluation simultaneously acts as an indicator of how well the system is working. Indeed, Rogers (2020) maintains that "this is an enormous amount of pressure for the education system to be judged on a random sample of students taking a two-hour test highly criticized for its methodology and analysis." In relegating success to external bodies for local measurements of success, the state has effectively shifted responsibility for progress to schools, parents, and children. In doing so, Apple (2001) cunningly articulates the antagonistic nature of neoliberalism where "the state shifts the blame for the very evident inequalities in access and [the] outcome it has promised to reduce" (p. 416).

Apple (2001, p. 416) poignantly conveys the grave concern in the neoliberal agenda, misplacing blame from the state to students (and implicitly teachers) where the macro understanding is framed as "part of a larger process in which dominant economic groups shift the blame for the massive and unequal effects of their own misguided decisions from themselves on to the state. The state is then faced with a very real crisis in legitimacy." The shift of the state to the individual must be identified as intentional and a continuation of meritocracy. Kaščák & Pupala (2011) argue the pervasive nature of neoliberalism has reached all levels of education in terms of ideas and decision-making processes. Part of the reframing neoliberalism builds over time has contributed to ideas of organization and control of learning and the goal of education (Kaščák & Pupala 2011, p. 152). Students, teachers, and other stakeholders in education also face consequences of neoliberal education reforms in terms of sense of self and others because they are pitted against one another.

Performance is particularly relevant in measuring student success both locally and globally, through such means, including the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). In short, higher test scores equate to greater success, an allegedly objective measurement of student achievement (Sjøberg 2019, p. 16). Unsurprisingly, performance reinforces the need for improvement in *Raise the Bar* with statements like "the results in these tests are simply not good enough," Glaze (2018) purports that "Nova Scotian students, parents and communities deserve better outcomes" (p. 15). On the other hand, McCracken and Rogers (2020) write to the claims, stating how the provincial scores were on bar with the highest achieving provinces. There is an important distinction whereby performativity extends beyond standardization and measurement. Considering teacher identity and professionalism, Ball (2016) argues that such conditions exacerbate "complex and powerful relationships" (p. 1052) by surveillance and evaluation of monitoring, which wrongly employs the terms performativity and productivity as synonymous.

Although recognizing the intention of PISA as an ambitious response to situate students in an increasingly global world, Sjøberg (2019) argues the contradictory nature in the format of testing throughout all 72 participating countries. Without access to resources, students must individually answer written questions in two hours, touted as "real life" situations (Sjøberg 2019, p. 22). Sjøberg (2019) scoffs at such trivialization, noting that in "real life, in private, at leisure as well at the workplace, is more or less the opposite of the PISA test situation" (p. 22), further lamenting the failure to emphasize competencies required in the economy, noting the reasonable expectation of an organization like OECD.

As noted, Sjøberg connects the lack of relevance in testing concerning real-life scenarios. Additionally, he notes the redundancy, rightly attributing that "the only place where you sit in solitude with a written test is in fact in exams at schools and universities. The only places where you are not allowed to communicate with others or allowed to use modern information technologies are similar test situations" (Sjøberg 2019, p. 22). The inequities socio-economically, mirrored in education, resound. For example, the PISA test is written in English and translated; however, many studies indicate the translation and adaptation (called "transadaptation") of PISA in other languages rely on a fixed notion of knowledge and concepts, not all of which directly transfer linguistically (Sjøberg 2019, pp. 24-25).

Expectedly, systematic errors because of translation and other sources of errors and uncertainty culminate in the lack of accountability by OECD. Professor Harvey Goldstein, "a highly respected senior in educational measurement," argues that PISA is "unforgiving" and calls on OECD to make changes in its focus to align with "accepted rules for scientific enquiry" (as cited in Sjøberg 2019, p. 26). Put simply, scholarly work across the globe augments the inequalities that globalized standard testing (re)produces. In doing so, Apple (2001) affirms, "the general outline of the winners and losers in the world … has been identified empirically" (p. 420). In addition, Ball (2016, p. 1054) asserts that:

> It is not that performativity gets in the way of 'real' educational work: it is a vehicle for changing what real educational work is! This is part of a larger process of 'ethical retooling' in the public sector,

> which is replacing client 'need' and professional judgment with commercial forms of accountability-driven decision-making. The space for the operation of autonomous ethical codes, based in a moral language shared among practitioners, in a community of practice, is colonised or closed down.

Performativity must consider the implications for student outcomes – beyond measurable results – that accompany standardized testing and the culture of accountability. Giroux (2013) is concerned by the lack of civic engagement in public schools. Instead, focusing on performance dominates education. Apple (2001) aptly argues such renderings directly attack democratic education resulting from the oversimplification of success to propagate the neoliberal agenda. Corbett (2008) agrees, stating that quality remains too complex and cannot be reduced to a single measurement (p. 368). Coining the term "ideology of the big lie," Giroux (2013) warns of the consequences of the current education deficit that "propagates the myth that the free-market system is the only mechanism to ensure human freedom and safeguard democracy" (p. 23). Giroux demonstrates leadership in speaking against injustices toward youth – an invocation of new ways to make sense of the education system.

Consider how support is garnered for reforms that sound good on paper but do not accomplish objectives in practice. There are two concepts central to teasing this idea. First, state actors, who hold power, resources, and thus influence. Secondly, and for most people, non-state actors refer to the social group who do not have direct say in state decision making but typically oblige in established rules and order. If education reforms are not helpful, how did general acceptance to move forward happen? A widespread understanding attributes hegemony to the complicit nature required of citizens in changing state directions.

Extending the social and state conditions to present, neoliberalism stands to disrupt the status quo in what Gill (2005) argues is "the reconfiguration of material power relations and a redistribution of wealth" (p. 55). By this, Gill means that the power of regulation shifts from state to the market. Indeed, Gill (2005) ushers the term "organized chaos," an

extension of market discipline (p. 55). The term organized chaos aptly fits in the schema of public education in Nova Scotia. The characteristics ascertaining Gill's term organized chaos include (a) systemic nature; (b) related to the devolution of government regulation; (c) sustained by "a relatively affluent, politically active minority" (2005, p. 55). Returning to Gramsci with the understanding of organized chaos, it should be noted that the superstructures of ideology – that is the institutionalization of social values – and political organization (the institutions and relations themselves) are what develop and transmute the material conditions. Thus, Dr. Glaze's report can be seen within organized chaos[1] as the recommendations attempt to bolster empirical evidence (through standardized testing and two hasty studies completed by Glaze herself).

Students as Entrepreneurs

Students are both implicitly and explicitly regarded for their perceived socioeconomic merit. The entire culture of performativity and standardized testing forms the foundation to examine implications for students, and more broadly speaking, school culture. In this section, the conversation extends to deliberate resulting material conditions because of neoliberal education rollouts. Peck and Tickell (2002) do just this by connecting neoliberal dogma of success demonstrating how it pertains to the micro-level (p. 382):

> Like the globalization rhetorics with which they are elided, discourses of neoliberalism have proved to be so compelling because, in representing the world of market rules as a state of nature, their prescriptions have a self-actualizing quality. Even as they misdescribe the social world, discourses of globalization and neoliberalism seek to remake it in their own image.

Peters (2017) refers to the shift in accountability to the student as "responsibilisation," where students are solely accountable for their economic prosperity (as cited in Rogers

[1] Interestingly, Glaze (2018) attributes the exact term of chaos to delineate the historical materialism of public education in Nova Scotia leading to the commissioning of her involvement (p. 1)

2018, p. 112). The Nova Scotian provincial government has maintained commitment to improving education in public discourse. Officially, *Restructuring* (Department of Education, 1994) framed a client-provider relationship to deliver defined needs. In her doctoral dissertation on neoliberal education in Nova Scotia, Rogers (2018) posits this moment as the local shift in dynamics that places teachers and administrators accountable for student success through measurement and evidence (p. 118). The trajectory of self-responsibility for best performance (and thus better opportunities) sustaining an upward and linear trend from this point, the mid-1990s, through to the present.

Scott and Hart (1979) theorized technical drifting, referring to social actors who prioritize technical job performance over moral obligations (cited in Brown 2004, p. 96). An example, hypothetically speaking, may be a teacher who does not have the resources (whether time, energy, or knowledge) to respond to student questions. Consequently, instead of developing curiosity and extending conversation generating awareness, the teacher focuses on the performance outcomes stipulated in curriculum, school policy, and the like. As an example, this should not be generalized or deduced to absolute truth. A key aspect reinforcing students as global citizens comes from "bureaucratic measures of control and surveillance" (Rogers 2018, p. 6). Such accountability systems bolster the perceived need for surveillance. That is, reason to gather evidence through data collection and digital monitoring platforms becomes comprehensible. Realistically, anyone inside or outside of education can perform technical drifting by the act of placing process and job performance above their morals. Given the pervasive nature of surveillance and accountability, the conditions to uptake technical drifting are nicely suited to neoliberal education reforms.

In Rapp, Silent, and Silent's (2001) study, results revealed 90% of educational leaders admitted to technical drifting (as cited in Brown 2004, p. 96). To be clear, such problems are intentional tactics of the neoliberal doctrine. Technical drifting produces machine-like processes resulting in measurable outcomes and performance-driven cultures. The

detrimental implications of technical drifting are fostered through complicit nature by the majority of educational leaders (as indicated by Rapp, Silent, and Silent's 2001 study).

Turning to students and technical drifting brings a similar set of concerns. Results from Taylor's (2020) study find neoliberalism inadequate in responding to silence that could be seen as unproductive and thus unnecessary; however, as Taylor argues, without producing results to fit in a neoliberal schema, silences are likely to be inefficient (p. 3). As such, Taylor problematizes how silence may result from many circumstances unrelated to productivity, relatively slow processing speed, language barriers, cultural underpinnings, or even (un)diagnosed learning or emotional disability. In this regard, the neoliberal system cannot respond to nuances that do not fit within its predetermined track of producing and results. Under such dehumanizing conditions for students, Taylor (2020) urges a reconsideration of administrators and policymakers to quickly label silence as inefficient on the basis that the essential processes of learning – "wondering, experimenting, exploring" (that often occur in interactional silence) – are to be eliminated in favour of concrete products that can be accounted for and evaluated (p. 8). Technical drifting as a mechanism attributed to promulgate neoliberal priorities (such as performativity and entrepreneurship through standardization) encapsulates students and educational leaders' dehumanizing nature by stifling the personal nature of knowledge and learning. such concepts are the antidote to critical consciousness insidiously working to suppress civic engagement at virtually every level.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

Hegemony has many theoretical perspectives but for this purposes of this thesis, the term refers to Gramsci's work on *cultural hegemony*, broadly defined as the power dynamics between social groups through the (ab)use of cultural institutions (like education). Cultural hegemony, developed by Antonio Gramsci, is found in his work published in 1971, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* a collection of observations as a prisoner between 1929 to 1935. Notably, Gramsci was the general secretary of the Community party – the very reason for his imprisonment given the fascist regime ruling Italy at the time. Gramsci (2005) maintained that the "separation of powers" is a direct result of class instability caused by "categories of intellectuals… [such as policy makers and politicians] are still too closely tied to the old dominant classes" (p. 31). The ability for people to shift out of their social class and position is dependent on their capacity to envision its possibility.

Significantly, hegemony proliferates through the "consent" of the dominated social group, what Apple & Weis (2012) argue the meaning is that "it can never be something that is permanent, universal, or simply given" adding that "[whatever the ruling class wants] needs to be won continually" (p. 82). This is not an insignificant point. Education *is a product* of ongoing struggle between those who are dominated (and their opposite, those who wield power). Understanding cultural hegemony gives credence to what is less seen, heard, or understood, but nonetheless renders an impact on those who participate in schools. One example to demonstrate cultural hegemony's implications in education, as detailed by Apple and Weis (2012), critically analyzes the resounding focus in education curriculum on math, science, and English (p. 69). (Note these are the very subjects used in international testing). Thus, when tensions inevitably arise from the working class through observation and possibly questioning or challenging inequities because of their social class, it can lead to social action. Either way, consent happens by the working class – that is, either the resistance is generally accepted or approved – does not guarantee change in the "dominant ideological forms" (Apple & Weis 2012, p. 82).

Apple (2012) writes to hegemony in education stating how we have a better understanding of how education acts in the economic sector which (re)produces inequalities (p. 20). Apple presents education as a neoliberal reform that weakens student agency while the state claims the opposite, that such changes will enable individual benefits. The issue is that individuals have the lived experience, but do not bear the brunt of inequality alone. Indeed, multiple social groups which individuals belong to means that to place individual responsibility for student performance is short sighted. It dismisses the larger social problems and unfairly relegates the problem as personal. As such, schools represent spaces where social inequities can be exacerbated because of inadequately addressing the root causes of power discords.

Apple (2012) argues that symbolic property accompanies economy property, placing schools as institutions largely responsible for "cultural preservation and distribution…[that]…recreate forms of consciousness that enable social control to be maintained without the necessity of dominant groups having to resort to overt mechanisms of domination" (p. 20). A self-serving ruling class cannot appear obvious. The importance of placing the social actors and institutions in their respective roles is vital to unpack the relations sustaining hegemony. Put another way, Boltadono (2012) notes how the agenda of fear worked for neoliberalism by putting national success onto the shoulders of schools for responsibility, whereby it was widely accepted that, without fixing schools, national economic power would falter (p. 494). Apple (2012) urges readers to consider multiple aspects here: knowledge taught, dominant social relations in classrooms, and "the school as a mechanism of cultural and economic preservation and distribution" (p. 21). Untangling these relations is an important counter-hegemonic action actively 'pulling apart' to the insidious ways hegemony "acts to 'saturate' our very consciousness, so that the educational, economic, and social world we see and interact with, and the common sense interpretations we put on it, becomes the world *tout court,* the only world" (Apple 2012, p. 22). Reiterating the significance of this social problem is apposite note.

Leveraging responsibility of the economy by what happens in classrooms is represented by neoliberalism has weaponized education to valorize its own agenda asserting itself as democratic, accountable, and as Boltando (2012) rightly points to, school choice (p. 494). Ironically, choice is heralded in neoliberal reforms as part of personal responsibility. To a certain degree this is true. Students must decide to what degree they will participate and engage with their learning in schools. Schools in a larger context have educational social actors, from schools themselves to teachers and the teacher's union, all of whom are subsumed into the manufactured threat of dwindling economic power. While school choice is proffered, its pitted against an increasing pressure for economic performance. More than ever, the value of education as a public good offered and protected by the state is now replaced by representing the exchange of commodity that can be traded in the market (Boltando 2012, p. 495; hooks, 1994). One of the most obvious indications of schools as commodities can be seen in the marketability of schools. Principals are responsible for promoting the most desirable testing scores, student behaviour, and attendance rates. Think tanks like Fraser Institute are responsible for publicizing scores and metrics (Frost, 2020). These components of student life fail to account for social factors explaining the complex nuances such as race and class that inform student livelihood.

Hegemony thrives in complexity, the assemblages of meanings and practices that lead to "unequal economic and cultural control" (Apple 2012, p. 22). Schools are not just for students, they are also for knowledge, what Raymond William's refers to as agents of selective tradition and of cultural "incorporation" (as cited in Apple 2012, p. 23). As schools are expected, the knowledge children and youth gain are vital for individual growth and development; however, what needs to be reconciled in understanding hegemony is how values, social capital, and appropriation of meanings inform educational leaders (Apple 2012, p. 23). The economic and political driving forces of what is taught – or not taught – serves to portray the state values on culture. In fact, the premise for Pamela Rogers's doctoral dissertation came from her lived experience as a social sciences teacher and bearing witness to the attribution of some knowledge as legitimate while discrediting others. Such positionality is unique, especially considering Apple's (2012) assertion on the

near impossibility for educators (as well as others) "to develop a portent analysis of widespread social and economic justice" because of "the latent effects of both absolutizing the individual and defining our role as neutral technicians in the service of amelioration" (p. 26).

Hoare (2016) importantly addresses the high likelihood that the hegemonic systems that are the most stable and solid have the least visibility of brute force pinning the reason to the daily commitment purporting "the logic of consent" (p. 124). The premise hinges that brute forces do exist, but are reserved for "a situation of crisis, whether organic or conjunctural" when political violence tends to resurface (p. 124). Instead, the idea of manufactured consent provides more productive means to drive public support. According to Gramsci, political negotiation and intellectual persuasion are key to constructing hegemony as consensual (Hoare 2016, p. 125). Noting hegemony operating at the level of the superstructure (that is, the institutionalization of social groups), Hoare (2016) sustains that hegemony is promulgated through agents, "the intellectuals, whose responsibility it is to make sure hegemony and the revolution of common sense coincide" (p. 126). Thus, the root of hegemony is not at the micro level, among the citizens, but it certainly is accepted (either implicitly or explicitly) by citizens.

A crucial element to understanding Gramsci's hegemony is referred to by Apple (2012) as "relational analyses," referring to situating social activity (like education) as a part of a larger network of institutions controlling resources favourably for themselves (p. 26). The unequal relations in society start not at schools, but the innerworkings of concomitate institutions responsible to inequities. Here, the significance lies in understanding cultural value. By employing relational analyses, the complex "ties and connections" are given meaning and used to understand how society is organized and controlled (Apple 2012, p. 26). Put simply, "the relations themselves are the defining characteristics" (Apple 2012, p. 26). Connecting hegemony to neoliberalism to demonstrate how relational analyses take shape, Apple (2012) depicts (p. 26):

> Thus, to understand, say, the notions of science and the individual, as we employ them in education especially, we need to see them as primarily ideological and economic categories that are essential to both the production of agents to fill existing economic roles and the reproduction of dispositions and meanings in these agents that will "cause" them to accept these alienating roles without too much questioning. They become aspects of hegemony.

Hegemony stands as an important element to understand how neoliberalism garners success without much push-back. In Apple's quoted passage, he neatly frames how economic justification can be justified while negating the ideological underpinnings of ontology. He makes it clear that educational research often fails to situate itself in the larger context, meaning that the daily lives of educators are often remised (Apple 2012, p. 29). A failure to include the relations between ideology and educational practice and how common-sense assumptions implicates the alleged neutrality of educational policy makers.

Returning to Gramsci with the understanding of organized chaos, it should be noted that the superstructures of ideology – that is the institutionalization of social values – and political organization (the institutions and relations themselves) are what develop and transmute the material conditions. In this sense, Peck & Tickell (2002) are exactly right in their call to action to examine the "different processes of neoliberalization," both theoretically and empirically (p. 382). Indeed, to do so deepens understanding of which neoliberal ideologies are (re)produced through institutions and political action, "since 'actually existing' neoliberalisms are always (in some way or another) hybrid or composite structures" (Peck & Tickell 2002, p. 382). Of course, this could not be condoned by the enterprises suggested. Doing so would incite avenues for critical consciousness and a platform where the stars (neoliberal actors) quickly become the clowns. Thus, Dr. Glaze's report can be seen within organized chaos[5] as the recommendations attempt to bolster empirical evidence (through standardized testing and two hasty studies completed by Glaze herself).

Antonio Gramsci's theory on hegemony aids to understanding uneven power relations by highlighting how people embrace dominant ideologies in covert ways (as cited in Brown 2004, p. 83). Chomsky and Waterstone (2021) reflect how the rulers are able to make 'common-sense' decisions based on the premise that most people believe they are doing so in the best interest of the governed. Freire's (2018) "*beings for themselves*" (p. 74) of education certainly applies here. Freire published in 1968, during a period of civil unrest in Brazil, just before the ascent of neoliberalism since the 1970s. For students to become "beings for themselves," the structure itself must be transformed so that students are not "integrate[d]" into the structure of oppression (Freire 2018, p. 74). Freire (2018, p. 76) maintains:

> The educated individual is the adapted person, because she or he is better "fit" for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created and how little they question it.

Freire (2018) maintains that the oppressed are a part of the structure responsible for the conditions of repression (p. 74). According to Freire (2018), oppressors rely on "people [to] fit the world the oppressors have created" coupled with "how little [the oppressed] question it" (Freire 2018, p. 76). In other words, the oppressed must have unquestioned compliance because this is an inextricable requirement to maintain the dehumanizing conditions leading to such moments in time.

According to Freire (2018), *dehumanization* is the process when people's humanity has been stolen; however, it is also the "distortion of the vocation in becoming more fully human" (p. 44). In a call for social justice, Freire (2018) argues that "an act is oppressive only when it prevents people from being more fully human" (p. 57). Freire's (2018) seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* articulates that in effort to regain their humanity from repression, the oppressed "sooner or later" confront the oppressors responsible for such conditions (p. 44). An important distinction Freire (2018) discerns is between freedom and liberation, stressing the latter must be attained in solidarity by both the oppressed and

oppressor. To arrive at liberation, the monumental process begins at an individual level that recognizes an internal motivation to act on a limiting situation seen as possible to be transformed (Freire, 2018). Under neoliberal education reforms, Taylor (2020) makes a direct reference to Freire, arguing that humanization in such frameworks is near impossible given structural reforms reinforced by austerity, accountability, and standardizations, "and through ideological discourses valorizing these same principles" (p. 2). The sorting and ranking of students and teachers alike in neoliberal education systems is certainly not congruent with learning as the process of humanization, specifically because neoliberal policy and practice does not permit "the nonlinear, process-oriented and student-driven stance taken by humanizing pedagogy" (Taylor 2020, p. 2).

The process Freire (2018) refers to describing the internalized compliance of the oppressed in allowing dehumanization is *prescription* where it "represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness" (p. 47). The extensive significance of prescription can be seen when looking at fear by the oppressed, whereby the fear of the unknown associated with the prospect of freedom could become even "greater repression" (Freire 2018, p. 42). Simply put, the fear of conditions worsening, or being unable to navigate different circumstances, can serve some to remain oppressed out of certainty and its accompanying comfort. Specifically, Freire (2018) writes, "the pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for their critical discovery that both they and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization" (p. 48). The reflexivity required to attain consciousness in recognizing limiting conditions must acknowledge the system as anything but random or coincidental. Freire (2018) refers to such a process when "the oppressed must confront reality critically, simultaneously objectifying and acting upon that reality" (p. 52). Giroux (2011) agrees, noting that for the social reproduction of inequality, we must provide ways that young people can identify imbalance, "to understand its covert presence in our lives and to see who benefits, and at whose expense" (as cited in Rodd & Sanders 2018, p. 53). Indeed, Freire (2018) sustains that social transformation rises from the oppressed when they are unwilling to continue as subjects of dehumanization when it

becomes "an inescapable concern" (p. 43). The will to move beyond oppression becomes greater than all else.

In Freire's most socially just conceptualization of education, (problem-posing), the oppressed can begin liberation through questioning their conditions and engage in dialogue. Through meaningful conversations – *dialogue* – contains two interrelated parts, according to Freire (2018): reflection and action (defined ruminatively together as *praxis*) (p. 87). Both dimensions of *praxis* – reflection and action – cannot lead to transformation without one another. In other words, they are both interrelated and interdependent. To be clear: the social actors benefitting from systems of oppression strategically oppose opportunity for praxis. Freire (2018) affirms, "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p.72). For students to engage in praxis is to challenge their *prescription*, described by Freire (2018) as "represent[ing] the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness" (p. 47). Changing the power relations between the student and teacher directly responds to redistributing hierarchal patterns of oppression.

Freire (2018) succinctly coins the initial moment leading action to regain humanity as "the tragic dilemma of the oppressed" (p. 48). Freedom begins with an internal recognition of one's place as less than human, coupled with an innate desire to change such conditions (Freire 2018, p. 46). At the same time, a duality exists where the oppressed – as products of *dehumanization* – have internalized their oppressor's consciousness. In contrast, it is also true in recognizing freedom where individuals can be their authentic self (Freire, 2018). On the other hand, the oppressors – responsible for reproducing and maintaining uneven power relations – are social actors in receiving oppression themselves (either consciously or unconsciously) by reproducing *dehumanization* (Freire 2018, p. 49). To understand the oppressed can only be possible when accounting for the oppressor's duality too, in both

performing and receiving oppression. Freire (2018) asserts that true liberation exists only when the oppressors and oppressed are free and can reclaim their humanity (p. 44).

Simply put, true liberation requires a collective approach, "where the solution…is born in the labor which brings into the world this new being: no longer oppressor nor longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom" (Freire 2018, p. 49). Lateralization needs to occur for solidarity between the oppressed and oppressors (who have more in common than they may realize). By doing so, Freire (2018) maintains these are the only conditions for liberation because it can only transpire in solidarity whereby both the oppressed and oppressors are side by side "to transform the objective reality" that leads to the shared reality as "being for another" (p. 49).

In this sense, examining the policy technologies of neoliberalism proliferated forms of oppression in impossible ways during Freire's time. Educational theorist Ball (2003, p. 218) speaks to the technologies and processes in place to monitor performance data producing results for marketable outcomes of education in his theory on "discursive interventions" (as cited in Rogers 2018, p. 30). Ball argues that the state employs *discursive interventions* to rearrange "who the education subjects are in education, and which values are embedded in policies, therefore affecting the education students receive and how it is delivered" (as cited in Rogers 2018, p. 30). As society advances with increased understanding and use of knowledge and technology, the pedagogy of the oppressed continues to implicate education in ways that present new challenges to understand. Freire (2018) maintains: "whereas the violence of the oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the response of the latter to this violence is grounded in the desire to pursue the right to be human" (p. 56). Therefore, to break the cycle of oppression is to recognize the dehumanizing effects that prevent being fully human. The process between being oppressed and fully human is the process of regaining humanity.

Central to understandings of the world and consciousness knowledge highlighting education as "the practice of freedom," is a direct opposition that "denies that a man is

abstract, isolated, independent and unattached to the world" found in education as "the practice of domination" (Freire 2018, p. 81). Giroux's (2013) theory of education deficit applies here, where Glaze (2018) situates students in terms of market value in a society that augments "consumerism is the essence of citizenship" (p. 137). We fail to move past education deficits if we do not embark on framing education as "a form of political intervention in the world that is capable of creating the possibilities for social transformation" (Giroux 2013, p. 140). In *problem-posing education*, Freire (2018) envisions students critically engaging with the relationship of self and others situated within an understanding of the world (p. 79). Understood as a process, knowledge (as it occurs in a transaction-like way in *banking education*) cannot be understood in *problem-posing education* without *dialogue* and *conscientização*. Liberating education regards knowledge and learning as ongoing, where no person is above another in the teacher-student and student-teacher relations. Freire (2018) argues that it is not in the interest of the oppressor to promote the *problem-posing education* as a strategic way to stifle knowledge to maintain dominance (p. 73).

Moreover, problem-posing education redresses "that the world exists as a reality apart from people" found in oppression (Freire 2018, p. 81). Indeed, Apple (2017) maintains that neoliberalism "does not stand alone" and "takes on different forms in different contexts" (p. 148). By understanding neoliberalism's contradictory tendencies, it is aptly understood as not a "unitary movement" (Apple 2017, p. 148). Apple (2017) concludes with a grave implication if we do not move beyond critical analyses of neoliberal policies and practices in education, where "we face a much more complicated set of actors and movements that have formed a tense but still tactical alliance" (p. 152). Dominant ideology will continue to grow without recognizing the strategic unfolding of neoliberalism in education.

Critical Feminism and Education

In terms of education, critical feminism serves to be an evolving body of work addressing injustices and oppressions in education (Gale de Saxe et al 2020, p. 56). A vital

element of critical feminism considers an intersectional framework that reflects the lived experience. hooks' writes in *Education as the Practice of Freedom* extending Freire's philosophy by framing an education system to thwart "the propagation of ideological elements in a racist, sexist, and classist society by interrogating the political implications of externally imposed [educational sanctions]" (as cited in Brown 2004, p. 86). That is, the day-to-day narratives and situations reveal knowledge of how structural forces implicate and (re)shape people.

Accordingly, the stakeholder's various responses lamenting concern after *Raise the Bar* was published in January 2018 is an important consideration for critical feminist approaches to understand how social actors are responding to the situation. Gale de Saxe et al (2020) position feminist theory as more grounded than Marxism by respecting both theory and lived experience and "not postponing liberation" (p. 56). Using a critical feminist lens views education reforms justified by buttressing inclusive education attempts to be equality-driven; however, in terms of oppression and the lived experience, critical feminists would examine if the objectives have been met. As Ertas and McKnight (2019) tellingly refer to as "complicat[ing] matters," they note that "there are often discrepancies between the underlying social and political forces and the rhetoric used to advance the policies" (p. 237). In line with critical feminism, Ertas and McKnight (2019) argue three interconnected pieces must be examined: political forces, policy beliefs, and policy propagation. Taken together, these can be examined for disconnects or congruities helping to explain the sociopolitical climate fostering such policies. "Narratives matter" and in asking why neoliberalism is widely accepted, Ertas and McKnight (2019) recount that "manufacturing consent requires critical deployment of policy stories" (p. 243). Critical feminist theory in education aims to respond to the injustices by considering how the moment occurred and examining different approaches to liberation (Gale de Saxe et al 2020, p. 56).

In seeking to disrupt oppression through a critical feminist lens, Gale de Saxe et al. (2020) address racialization and racism as social constructs that should be addressed in

education (p. 62). Ladson-Billings' (2021) proposition of culturally relevant pedagogy affirms that diverse perspectives can be integrated into the conversation while empowering *conscientização*. This cannot be done within a neoliberal education framework that rejects critical thinking and ways to address social injustice. What Gale de Saxe et al. (2020) propose is "the need to rearticulate Whiteness" so we can consider the ways "unexamined Whiteness" serves to reinforce oppression (p. 62). This should not be taken lightly. Brown (2004) positions educational leaders in the position to teach in a way that is socially responsible, equitable, and successful; however, to do this, Brown argues that substantive changes are required in two areas, educational leadership preparation and professional development programs (p. 80). Studies by Ryan (2003) and Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, and Walker (2002, as cited in Brown, 2004) empirically demonstrate how educational leaders are equipped with knowledge on how to manage diversity conflicts but fail to meaningfully implement tactics in the situations. Tools to analyze racial conflict and strategies to build positive inclusive environments are required to do this. Brown (2004) adds that vocabulary, skills, and knowledge to manage conflicts in difference is urgently required to "confront socially difficult topics with respect, dialogue, and a continuous expansion of awareness, acknowledgement, and action" (p. 80).

Connell (1993) argued that the mainstream curriculum is hegemonic because it frames common-sense understandings of knowledge and learning through organized power that does not work for those without a high cultural ground or alternative ways of knowing or understanding (as cited in Cui 2018, p. 1154). Acknowledging liberation requires conditions to resituate students as "sites of knowledge" from Gloria Ladson-Billings ground-breaking research in 1995 led to her theory of *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*. Results and findings by Landson-Billings (2021) call for educators to foster knowledge building on students with diverse backgrounds of knowledge, understanding, and culture. Notably, a dialogue would be unapproved in banking education, where knowledge and learning are predetermined.

Freire (2018) asserts "the oppressor consciousness [that] tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of domination" (Freire 2018, p. 58). The dehumanization of students placed on a one-way path to become global leaders circumvents the authentic and lived experiences problematized by social class. An example of this discussed previously is the inequitable means of standardized testing, particularly in international settings. As expected with success, the best results spur the greatest accolades. In doing so, students unable or not wanting to "fit in" the prescribed education evaluation are continuously left to fend for themselves. Finally, a call to action toward rehumanization by Apple (2019) stresses the *unlearning* required "to talk in ways that do not mystify" – specifically in terms of ambiguity, guises, and common-sense language – further arguing that we must work toward a place where we can "embody a real commitment to making the case for a more robust critically democratic education clearly and in compelling ways publicly" (p. 280).

Chapter 5: Methodology

The research started differently than what is presented. Growing up in rural Ontario, I was aware from an early age how education outcomes differed based on region alone. In university, my understanding broadened to more fully comprehend the structural forces guiding school administration and decision making. The original conceptualization of the my research was to consider how educational leaders witnessed racism in their schools. I wanted to hear what Principals and Vice Principals witnessed diversity and how they viewed their role as a leader to address obstacles to student performance.

Policy became a place of interest because it creates a framework to examine a specific subject matter. In my research, I began to tease apart the role of policy as it relates to inclusion, innately guided by my curiosity between how policy and practice 'plays out.' Admittedly suspicious, I wanted to concretely know what loopholes there were and analyze how policy could be improved to be meaningfully inclusive. Thus, I considered the originating document suitable as a pragmatic place to start investigating i*f* education reform initiatives made a point of inclusion and what it formally looked like. As such, I chose Glaze's *Raise the Bar* for a research project to better understand the commitment to inclusion with the vision to extend this research in graduate studies, perhaps through qualitative interviews to assess the lived experiences by teachers and students as it relates to diversity and inclusion.

Retirees are particularly significant research participants in a few profound ways. First, the span of a retired person's career over many years provides a wealth of experiences and information. Second, and more importantly, there is a greater degree of agency is associated with a retiree, who does not have responsibility to report to their employer. The one interview I held, with a retiree, revealed new understandings to explain why I received silence, even when there was an indication of interest. As it turns out, HRCE has its own internal REB process that was outside of the timeline required for my research.

I chose Glaze's *Raise the Bar* for a research project to better understand the commitment to inclusion through education reform. In my own experience as a mother of two children in the education system, I witnessed firsthand neoliberal education reform roll out changes through my interactions with the school. I found the system difficult to navigate and it was apparent the sentiment was not mine alone. Thus, I combined two passions in a way I could not have anticipated: addressing efforts for inclusion in public schools and my own alienating experiences as a student and the product of the neoliberal education system.

Critical Analyses

There is a multiplicity of definitions on the topic of sociology, policy, and critical analysis. For example, Gale (2001) argues there are three interrelated terms for essentially the same premise: critical policy sociology, critical policy analysis, and critical policy scholarship (p. 381). Several perspectives (and labels) speak to the methodology employed in this thesis. Ertas & McKnight (2019) note how the role and influence of stakeholders in the policy process and change provides the basis for policy process theories. In addition, changes (or lack thereof) are also of concern in using policy process theories. Though this thesis does not explicitly use process theories, the central tenets described of stakeholder influence and changes overlap with critical policy analysis. Jenny Ozga (1987) defines policy sociology as "rooted in the social science tradition, historically informed and drawing on qualitative and illuminative techniques" (as cited in Gale 2001, p. 380). In particular, one characterization Ozga describes of policy sociology is 'historically informed' (Gale, 2001). Other scholars argue this is not specific enough – nor uncommon to sociology. As such, viewing policy as text and discourse is the most recent shift in theorizing policy. Most tellingly, Troyna (1994) describes the importance in identifying whose interests the policy serves, "by the conviction that 'things,' especially policy discourse, must be pulled apart" (as cited in Gale 2001, p. 382). Accordingly, establishing influences during the production of policy can deliver empirical evidence by bringing in theoretical and political considerations asking the purpose and primary beneficiaries of the policy.

Critical policy analysis interrogates power imbalances. It recognizes how structural forces serve to maintain the status quo that effectively (re)produces inequalities. Bringing in policy creates linkages between the state, institutions, and people to interrogate how some social groups are valued over others and how such processes are formalized. Peck and Tickell (2002) aptly describe how critical analyses (p. 383):

> …do have the virtue of underscoring the inescapably political character of the globalization project and the hegemonic position of neoliberalism in global agencies and discourses.

Understanding neoliberalism as a process, not an 'end state' is significant to recognize its breadth. Moreover, it serves to be inherently contradictory, described by Peck and Tickell (2002) as "exist[ing] in historically and geographically contingent forms" (p. 384). As such, analysis centred on changes to patterns and reforms are more fruitful than direct comparisons between two documents produced at different times. Specifically, the increasing pervasive nature of neoliberalism "have involved complex (and often indirect) extensions of national state power, most notably in the steering and management of programs of devolution, localization, and interjurisdictional policy transfer" (Peck & Tickell 2002, p. 391). The importance of critical policy analysis to understand the shifts in neoliberalism most aptly tends to the power imbalances through being 'historically informed' and recognizes empirical evidence through what is said but, profoundly, what is *not* said, in order to determine the influences and beneficiaries in the policy.

Jenny Ozga (2008) describes how knowledge has changed both in its dissemination and respective speed. The power of the state to direct how knowledge is managed in schools is of particular importance considering power imbalances. Ozga (2008) writes, "Knowledge is (governing) power, and governance steers knowledge" (p. 262). Thus, state actors and decision makers wield incredible power in how the youngest citizens, students, learn and make sense of the world through their experiences at school. Ozga (2008) articulates the extent of knowledge embedded in people, arguing how "knowledge is now *internal* to, i.e. part of – rather than *external* to and distinct from – the economic process,

and growth is dependent on maximising the outputs of knowledge workers and the productivity of knowledge resources" (p. 265, emphasis in original). Knowledge is a crucial basis to understand power imbalances through addressing accessibility and priorities for different social groups.

The overlapping spheres of public and private, as demonstrated through knowledge governance, validate the careful considerations necessary to denote the process, practices, and relations in neoliberal education reforms. Ball (2006) poignantly shares the entanglement (as cited in Ozga 2008, p. 269):

> Research is thoroughly enmeshed "in" the social and "in" the political, and developments and innovations within the human sciences, like education, are intimately imbricated in the practical management of social and political problems

Verger et. al (2019) argue how understanding policy and its social relevance is necessary to critical analysis of education reforms, describing how "policy instruments choice is a very political moment" (p. 250). Acknowledging a 'layering process', Verger et al (2019) emphasize how new frameworks are adopted in time, creating conditions for public approval. By teasing out the contexts, the impact of policy on education administration can be further analyzed.

The Glaze report was chosen as the source document inviting the most recent neoliberal reform rollout. I remember seeing the headlines at the time and connecting into the experiences my children were having, making a direct link between policy and practice. The Glaze report was read through once without notetaking the first time. The next time, I read through looking for ways inclusion was perceived by a consultant responsible for providing policy recommendations. I was curious what would be framed as important and what measures were used to sustain claims in *Raise the Bar*. The most obvious theme came through an economic lens. That is, *Raise the Bar* envisioned students in terms of products of the economy and, on this account, affirmed students as future assets (to the economy, assumingly). From here, the political undertones informing Glaze's report fit within

neoliberalism as I understood it at the time – free markets and a focus on efficiency. Upon closer study, neoliberalism was much more than improving inefficiencies. Neoliberal projects subsumed a covert power imbalance, and it was on this account my interest in policy piqued. Reading the report many times, I was interested in examining the dynamic between policy and practice under neoliberal education reform rollouts believing that it seemed too good to be true, to make similar promises in each reform. It reasoned to me that if they were fulfilled as previously promised, any efforts for reform would not be necessary.

It became clear that the complex history of education in Nova Scotia would need to be detailed for readers to make sense of the significance of the Glaze report. Moreover, the education system needed to be explained enough so the concepts in the Glaze report could be understood within the bigger picture of political systems and decision-making processes. With the critical background information of history and lay of the land in public education, the themes emerged merging the topics of meaningful inclusion and neoliberal education reform rollouts together. As such, the literature review is structured to examine the common themes in similar research which included students as entrepreneurs, performance, and the naturalization of reforms. In findings, the themes of analysis contextualize *Raise the Bar* as a neoliberal project. First, the role and state of education as outlined in Glaze's report is established to set a foundation to understand Nova Scotia's perspective of reform efforts and respective highlights. From here, several specific themes to neoliberal projects bring together pertinent elements from Glaze's report. It is shown how, in multiple places, Glaze portrays a crises moment for the recommendations to seem as natural. The literature review bolstered the findings and was elaborated on in the discussion to identify the implications such as measuring performance being justified as natural and inevitable. Accordingly, the themes weave between the literature review, findings, and discussion bringing in a critical analysis of relevant literature, findings in *Raise the Bar* and discussing the significance as it pertains to public education in Nova Scotia.

Another theme centred on meritocracy, whereby student responsibility is measured through performance, surveillance, and putting the onus of success on teachers and students alike. Relatedly, the role of education in the findings serves to consider what education should provide (as the province sees it). In the discussion, meritocracy is seen in many places, such as how education works to reproduce social classes to maintain the status quo. Meritocracy can also be seen in the teaching profession, considering one of Glaze's recommendations for a professional regulatory body and what is titled 'measuring the performance of performance', referring to the onus on teachers for the dual task of their performance but also in supporting success of students (as the state sees it).

The vulnerability of neoliberal projects is considered through the lens of responsibility. Neoliberal projects create (or 'fix') systems to improve efficiency, accountability, and profits. Streamlined processes leave little margin for error. Thus, the role of legitimacy is a central concern not just for neoliberal projects, but for those 'on the ground' working in the systems, like teachers in education reform rollouts. Teachers have a professional obligation that neoliberal projects rely on for compliance and to maintain the system. (It is part of their *job*, as teachers, after all – to follow the Department's guidelines and processes). In this way, neoliberal projects (re)produce inequities by maintaining the status quo. Worse yet, the 'doing' of keeping the power imbalance is not performed by the system, but by social actors who participate in the system as participants through work or study. The ways teachers and students are considered, supported, and envisioned in neoliberal education rollouts highlights crucial concern for meaningful inclusion and equity.

Chapter 6: Findings

In *Raise the Bar*, Glaze (2018) rightly attributes "how we govern and administer our schools is absolutely fundamental if we are to build a more robust education system in this province" (p. 4). To provide recommendations based on regional needs, Glaze's (2018) research consisted of provincial results for international student assessments, both PISA and CPAP, in addition to 91 consultations and 1,500 online surveys and the Auditor General's recent analysis. Citing a tumultuous recent history, Glaze (2018) situates the role of *Raise the Bar* in the series of events, stating that "the reflections and content also acknowledge the lingering impact of the recent labour dispute, a divisive and draining time, with effects that are still being felt months later" (p. 4). Indeed, recognizing the sociohistorical significance of how this report came to be creates an inclusive measure in addressing the relevance of recommendations to educational governance and administration.

The intent of hiring a consultant to address the educational issues in Nova Scotia puts Glaze in a position to narrow in on the delinquencies. Intriguingly, Glaze brings several important topics forward, though some arguably are unnecessarily reinforced to manufacture a crises. Specifically, while problems may be present, the extent of catastrophizing raises red flags regarding the impetus put forth. *Raise the Bar* recognizes the sensitive and polarizing nature of educational history and policy making in the province. To a certain degree, the splintered nature and lack of cohesion in Nova Scotian education warrants criticism like Glaze offers, so as to recognize both strengths and weaknesses. It is important to recognize that issues can be addressed without catastrophizing them unnecessarily; however, to give credit where credit is due, Glaze rightly acknowledges that changes are needed; this is not the debate. Instead, the issues undergird two concerning spheres requiring further analysis. First, in the extent of how Glaze problematizes Nova Scotian education. Secondly, the recommendations Glaze offers should be considered for ability to address the cited problems. Therefore, the approach to understand *Raise the Bar* recognizes its own strengths and weaknesses.

Preparing *Raise the Bar* meant the materialization of three foundational principles and seven supporting principles for decision making. Taken together, Glaze (2018) asserts "the thinking and recommendations of this report must first be defensible and in step with these principles" (p. 5). The table below outlines the foundational principles that guide the recommendations, accommodated by supporting principles to focus on specific aspects.

Table 1

Foundational Principles (Glaze 2018, p. 5)	Supporting Principles (Glaze 2018, pp. 5-6)
• Student learning and achievement • Equity and excellence • Well-being, character development, global citizenship	• Integration, alignment and coherence • Trust, respect, and transparency • Empowered and responsible • Responsiveness and flexibility within established parameters and goals • Stewardship • Efficiency and effectiveness • Clarity of roles and responsibilities

The findings present an overview of the structure of *Raise the Bar* and extends attention to important considerations to create a springboard to examine themes in the report. First, the findings examine how *Raise the Bar* is framed as a response to a crises. Setting the stage to reveal the social problems as Glaze sees it serves to attribute how the implementation of manufactured crises creates platforms for neoliberal reform. Next, the role of education presents ways Glaze frames education. Of particular importance, Glaze (2018) writes that "the Department envisions this as the complementary next step to improving the entire school system" (p. 4), meaning that the role of education according to Glaze undergirds the recommendations put forth. Of the roles of education, the findings further demonstrate the themes of individual responsibility, austerity, and accountability. Taken together, these themes represent the strategic and carefully planned ways neoliberal education reforms

are presented as solutions. Finally, the findings highlight how equity is represented in *Raise the Bar*. In each of the presented themes, the driving force (whether explicit or implicit) remains vital to critically assess neoliberal education reforms in Nova Scotia considering who benefits and why.

The State of Education

Raise the Bar sets a purview of main education participants and functions in Nova Scotia. The current structure of education has been in place since 1996, when the amalgamation of 22 school boards into 8 took place, alongside a new legislative framework (Glaze 2018, p. 7). The levels of governance are at the provincial level (Department of Education), the regional level (school boards), and the local levels (School Advisory Councils, known as SACs). At this time, the French first-language schools have been independently governed by one provincial Francophone board, the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP). The guiding legislation for the Department is under the Education Act. Glaze (2018) notes the role of administration as "how schools are run and the responsibility for their success" whereas governance refers to "ensuring the province has the right structures, policies, roles, and responsibilities in place" (p. 7). Both the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) hold the responsibility for Nova Scotian schools and education (Glaze 2018, p. 7). The school program, curriculum, school board funding, and teacher certification all fall under the Department. In addition, the Department has the authority for "policies, priorities, and overall leadership" in Nova Scotian education (Glaze 2018, p. 7).

School boards are accountable to the Minister whilst providing regional control and management of schools. Of eight school boards, each have a central office to manage functions like finance, programs, student services, human resources, and operations (Glaze 2018, p. 7). For each school board there is a superintendent, "who is in charge of the daily decision making to bring life to the priorities of the education system," including the supervision of all employees of the school board (Glaze 2018, p. 7). Consider framing the

chain of command as schools having accountability to the superintendent; from there, the superintendent represents the school board to the Minister, on behalf of the Department.

At a school level, teachers are the front line of education, working in classrooms to directly translate the curriculum to student outcomes. Principals hold a supervisory role for teachers, as well as other stakeholders like parents and SACs to "reflect the goals of the school board, and carry out strategies to meet student achievement targets" (Glaze 2018, p. 7). Ultimately, principals are the leaders of their school and responsible for the school. They receive advice and recommendations from SACS. The use of SACs is to connect the school to the community through volunteer representatives (like parents, community members, students, and staff) (Glaze 2018, p. 7). SAC meetings are held regularly to discuss "priority issues" as per the Education Act.

Acknowledging a network of regions, roles, and responsibilities to serve Nova Scotian students, Glaze (2018) testifies (p. 38):

> If we are to provide excellence in education, we must have equity – and that means we must do our best for every student from every background. Regardless of where they live, what language they speak, their family situation, students must have equitable opportunities and supports to thrive.

One common ground across most social groups is equity, where students with less social capital are not at a significant disadvantage to their counterparts. Equity is a trendy word, to indicate inclusion. What is more important, of course, is the meaningful implementations for equitable opportunities and supports.

The Role of Education

Given *Raise the Bar* is an independent report on the state of education in Nova Scotia, it is vital to consider how the role of education is reinforced throughout the report. Glaze

(2018) rightly points to a widely accepted fact that "the current system design suffers from unclear accountabilities, roles and responsibilities, redundancies and conflicts, overlapping authorities and reporting structures" (p. 24). Glaze is not wrong. The public assertion for adjustments to education in Nova Scotia have been long documented, such as in *Horizons* (1995) and *Brighter Futures* (Department of Education, 2005). The question remains: do significant changes to a fragile system aim to 'right the wrong'?

Critical assessment of Glaze's recommendations as to their effectiveness is required to verify if they meaningfully have clear accountabilities, roles and responsibilities, limit redundancies and conflicts, and work to reduce overlap in authority and reporting. Given the criticism in *Raise the Bar* stating deficits, a lateral reform that repackages what does not work effectively recalibrates education reform in a palatable form of hope. In effect, the problem would not be resolved; instead, it would be marred serving to delay meaningful education reform rollouts whilst providing another testament to what does not work. While this trajectory is hypothetical, it serves as a reminder of why the government sought a consultant for education in the first place. One would hope the government intends to make changes that are not band-aids but seek to make meaningful changes to improve Nova Scotian schools. As Glaze (2018) points out in her in person consultations, many people attributed good intentions in policy with "unintended consequences" (p. 21). As *Raise the Bar* draws attention to the dynamics of unforeseen consequences in educational policy, it is with great interest to consider if the recommendations set forth mimic the same noted trend.

Centralizing education is a common theme in *Raise the Bar*. In fact, it is the crux of the first supporting principle labelled "integration, alignment and coherence" whereby "all recommendations must flow into a system that is straightforward and unified" (Glaze 2018, p. 5). At many points in the report, Glaze highlights overarching feedback by Nova Scotians who believe they are not being heard. Folks sharing this include "teachers, principals, parents, and the community" (Glaze 2018, p. 26). Glaze signals that "established channels" are dysfunctional since these voices are not heard. The common-sense notions of progress

are substantiated by including some feedback (that augments her points) while not interrogating why other groups remain out of the conversation. In addition, Glaze (2018) notes "work-arounds," specifically citing the Council on Classroom Conditions, the Principals' Forum, and the Commission on Inclusive Education, attributing the onus to both school boards and the Department (p. 26). Ultimately, Glaze (2018) uses this understanding of a "dysfunction in its school boards" (p. 26) to bolster centralizing education. Glaze frames the system as broken for the people it serves, and while receiving attention in 'work-arounds,' the approach is not sustainable. A critical analysis of the dysfunction is not wrong, and Glaze (2018) rightly attributes the dysfunction in school boards before 2018, noting that "on occasion, the Minister has suspended a Board entirely and replaced it with a single, appointed Board Chair" (p. 26). A move to disband a Board, not once, but three times – that is, three separate boards within a five-year span – indicates structural issues at the Board level. Notably, CSAP is not included in the recommended centralization. The disconnect between the decision makers and school operations can be seen by one comment by a survey response stating the Department should "…be encouraged, even mandated, to spend more time in the schools on a regular basis" (Glaze 2018, p. 21). In a centralizing structure, checks and balances like regular visits from decision and policy makers are vital to ensure the system works as designed. It is no surprise this suggestion came from the bottom up.

Moreover, in an environmental scan of news between 2018 to present (2022), such endeavour for on-site visits has not occurred (at least to which has been published for the publics knowledge) (Frost, 2020). Part of Glaze's recommendations must recognize that recommendations on their own may not work as intended. It is profound to note, given she is not responsible for the implementation of her recommendations. Indeed, Glaze (2018) provides other suggestions for checks and balances, like reviewing the RCE model in five years, "regardless of student achievement levels" (p. 26). It is incumbent on the government and Department to ensure the checks and balances provided become commitments, not just empty words. With a selecting some of Glaze's recommendations, the progress and success of implementation must be tempered with knowledge of what

was not implemented; the dissonance between what recommendations are implemented or not versus the success may reveal areas requiring further attention. Indeed, Glaze (2018) maintains that "we need a system that is coordinated, unified, inclusive, and responsive" (p. 24).

Perhaps the most repeated message in *Raise the Bar* is the undeniable role confusion. Whether coming from the Nova Scotia School Boards Association (p. 11), Glaze's survey respondents – of whom "several called for the end of political influence in the education sector," (p. 19) or implications for SACs and principals, the message was clear and thoroughly reinforced: a system with continuous changes has resulted in confusion of roles and responsibilities. This is not insignificant. In fact, Glaze identifies one of seven supporting principles to address confusion, rightly labelled as "clarity of roles and responsibilities," but also appears under another supporting principle, "empowered and responsible," where Glaze (2018) affirms that "everyone must know what they are supposed to do – and then be accountable for their decisions and actions" (p. 5). As alluded to in the participant feedback calling for an end to political influence in education, the roles and responsibilities are rightly to be well known and understood, not just to employees in the education system, but also students, parents and guardians, and community members alike.

The evaluation and recommendations by Glaze provide a key moment in time to acknowledge the current role of education. Most remarkably, Glaze (2018) refers to "the esteemed mental health expert, Dr. Stan Kutcher" who points to new beliefs where "society is now expecting schools to be there to help parents raise their children" (p. 32). In the fifth recommendation, Glaze (2018) urges for "wrap-around" facilities in each school, so government departments can be accessed for both students and families (p. 31). Significantly, the government depart accessed in wrap-around facilities are not limited to education, "but also support from mental health professionals, health care providers, justice, family services, and so on" (Glaze 2018, pp. 31-2). The framing of schools as communities does not end with support in wrap-around facilities, as Glaze (2018) also

maintains that the transition out of high school after graduation must be supported by schools, through connecting high school students with program opportunities and career choices through local institutions like the college, universities, and businesses (p. 32). The call for support in the development of children and youth is a first step to address the social expectations of schools, as outlined by Dr. Kutcher.

The role of education as Glaze sees it is also entrusted with accountability, respect, and increasing public trust. Several instances reinforce this. In the seventh recommendation, Glaze (2018) asserts a provincial College of Educators to be a regulatory body for teachers, "helping to improve public confidence in the education system across the province" (p. 33). According to Glaze (2018), the college of educators would provide an impartial role to that of NSTU, "without the conflict of interest when a group is in charge of both negotiating its membership needs and overseeing discipline" (p. 33). The college would be responsible for teacher licenses, governance, discipline, and regulation of the profession. Because of accountability, respect, and increasing public trust, Glaze (2018) provides other recommendations, even as a main tenet like recommendation twelve, calling for "coordinated professional development system" for teachers and principals (p. 35). In this recommendation, Glaze (2018) advocates for better alignment between professional development with "teaching standards, student achievement, curriculum priorities, such as math, literacy and culturally responsive teaching, and learning strategies that can be readily implemented in their classrooms" (p. 35). The call for a more accountable professional development framework certainly comes out of the highly publicized frenzy in 2015, when the Department received significant criticism in this area.

Finally, there are several reinforcements of the role of education in the recommendations that signal a bridging between the previous structure and Glaze's vision. Reinforcing acute Department accountability, respect and increase public trust comes from the call to "make every effort to grow our own teachers" (Glaze 2018, p. 38). Investments to educational assets in the system already, like committed teachers, is an important reinforcement of the role of the Department to invest in its teachers. Reinforcing checks

and balances, the fifteenth recommendation calls for an Educational Ombudsperson who would act independently of the government and schools, all the while "dedicated to matters related to student achievement, well-being and voice, and report regularly to the public" (Glaze 2018, p. 37). Like administration and government stakeholders spending time in schools, Glaze recognizes that issues left unchecked are liabilities to the department, and detrimental to respective experience received in schools. At the same time, Glaze recognizes that "individual concerns should always first be addressed at the school level," meaning that a channel for voicing concerns is established.

Crises Moment

> It has become clear that there are well-recognized problems facing the system and that business as usual cannot continue. While many good and competent Nova Scotian educators have struggled to make it work, we need serious reform to let them to do their best work under better conditions (Glaze 2018, p. 23)

Without delay, *Raise the Bar* captures duality in schools of both division and optimism for a better future, poignantly expressing that "we may not agree on all of the points, yet we all agree on this: the children of Nova Scotia cannot wait" (Glaze 2018, p. 4). Naturally, the well-being of children is a common value across all stakeholders. What may be an important concept to reify in this regard stems from the value of a careful and planned approach to education reform to underscore how immediate change may not be in the best interest of children. In this sense, children *can* wait as a strengthened approach to reform results in many of the issues Glaze seeks to address. Within the first few pages in *Raise the Bar*, the crises moment is present from the outset of Glaze's report to place a sense of urgency on the state of education.

Invoking a socio-historical context, Glaze (2018) acknowledges and addresses important events in Nova Scotia's education that lack cohesion and trust. *Raise the Bar* includes a purview of notable moments in education. Events such as the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) dissolution in 2006 due to "performance issues" (Glaze 2018, p. 8)

are found in *Raise the Bar*. The event's significance recounts how the Minister of Education appointed one person to continue the board's authorities – which, notably – remained in place until the 2008 board election. Despite the drastic measure, it was not the only time the Department sought to remove the abuse of powers in the education system.

As the first recommendation, and most notable in school operations today, Glaze argues that school boards are ineffective and not meeting Nova Scotian school needs. Drawing on other provincial education reforms and the "dysfunctional relationship" attributed to the "suffer[ing]" of "student achievement and learning" (p. 24), Glaze (2018) enforces the common-sense approach to school organization through reducing school boards. Instead of attempting to address the problems school boards face, Glaze opts to remove them entirely, based on provincial education reform trends. In addition, Glaze (2018) brings in regional impetus, recounting how school board members face obstacles that "can make it difficult to coordinate efforts on the ground to tackle complex social problems related to things like health, poverty, and crime" (p. 13). Glaze hinges on the dual responsibility of school board members between "special interest or other highly mobilized groups within their constituencies" instead of the common good for the people in the district. Instead of providing a recommendation to change the nature of school board members, or more broadly, school board functions, Glaze heralds a key recommendation from the 2014 Freeman Report, to remove school boards. Glaze (2018) sets the stage to do so, urging that "the current system is too fractured and fragmented for such a small province, playing catch-up when it comes to goals of 21st century education" (p. 23). Based on the assertion that centralization will operationalize the antidote to a fractured and fragmented school system, Glaze (2018) continues stating that consequently, it "generates tensions within the system that distract from a focus on the areas that need greatest attention: student achievement and the capacity building to make this possible" (p. 23). Whether Regional Centres for Education (RCE's) is the answer remains a debate. Nonetheless, schoolboards were abandoned later in 2018 (Gorman, 2018).

Based on being "too far behind already in student achievement" and that "it is simply unfair to children, families, and their communities," Glaze (2018) augments that "we cannot wait on everything" (p. 26). Echoing the duality faced by school board members, Glaze (2018) focuses on principals, who "are often town between exploding demands and high expectations" and rightly attributes how "many are exhausted as they work to take care of their own families, take post-graduate courses, all while being buffeted about with complaints and ever-expanding roles" (p. 33). Though principals certainly face conflicting priorities due to the stacking responsibilities required of educational leaders, *Raise the Bar* recommends removing both principals and vice-principals from the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU), offering a new professional association instead. Armed with the supposed interests of principals who "spend their days putting out fires" and their disposition "caught between loyalty to their union and loyalty to their roles as educational leaders and school administrators in their communities," Glaze (2018) notes how the role of principals and vice-principals in both schools and the union invokes a conflict of interest, because management and employees are in the same union. In an abridged approach, Glaze's recommendation came to fruition resulting in the Union being comprised without Principals and Vice Principals. Even when praising developments, Glaze signals the work is not done. On account of new measures for inclusion, Glaze (2018) notes how "the department has made strides in building a more diverse workplace," using this to bolster the next steps, "now, it must do more" (p. 37). The focus is less on what works and weighs heavily on what needs to happen.

Glaze (2018) emphasizes the need to "increase trust, accountability, and transparency" accurately noting "the department does not enjoy the full trust of Nova Scotians to fulfill this role" (p. 36). The solution offered is detailed later under Efficiency; however, for the purposes of a crisis's moment, note that Glaze is not wrong in her observation stressing implications stemming from deficiencies in trust, accountability, and transparency of the Department. To address this, Glaze recognizes credibility needs to be central. The solution to the department's reputation, according to Glaze (2018), is to create an independent Student Process Assessment Office (SPAO) referring to the Office's primary responsibility

to "conduct research, analyze data, present findings, and make recommendations without perceived bias or interference" (p. 39). On its own, this makes a great deal of sense. Certainly, checks and balances are vital to democracies and fettering unobstructed power. What is greatly concerning is this Office is specific to assessments, meaning that an Office would be dedicated to the surveillance of students and teachers alike. The concept of a SPAO is inextricably related to the role of the traditional intellectual to present common sense as factual. Assessments are a tool to usher in confidence; they act to provide benchmarks and insight on any student delays or progressions. The notion of student's not performing "well enough" (Glaze 2018, p. 36) is peppered throughout the report to reinforce the crises requiring attention. Significantly, Glaze's assertion of underperformance large hinges on student assessments.

In establishing a crises moment, Glaze draws on many perspectives to augment her perspective regarding the dire state of education. She also carefully balances criticism with praise to soften the criticism. For example, Glaze (2018) gives credence to preceding education reform efforts in Nova Scotia, stating "while many good and competent Nova Scotian educators have struggled to make it work" (p. 23). After affirming good intentions, Glaze (2018) reinforces the crises requiring a response, asserting "we need serious reform to let them do their best work under better conditions" (p. 23). Glaze (2018) draws on interviews under the heading *What I Heard*, stating the most common responses she received were "lack of clarity" and "mistrust" (p. 17). Thus far, readers are to understand the system does not work, not because of the teachers, but because of the system at large. The premise for Glaze's (2018) perspective comes early in *Raise the Bar,* when she states that "no matter where you stand or where you sit, we can all agree the administrative system needs significant improvement if Nova Scotian students are going to be the leaders of our communities, our nation, and our world" (p. 5). To be clear, Glaze begins to target the source of the problem: the administrative process.

Though truthful in part, the main reason the education system is fractured in the previous government policies. Of course, as a consultant hired by the government, Glaze

faces limitations on what she can or cannot say, especially regarding the institution responsible for hiring her. While the problem begins from the government and administration, the assertion for Nova Scotian students to be leaders at each level fails to acknowledge the reason students are in schools: to learn. Students do not learn so they may become external leaders. Students learn to become leaders of their own lives. The disembodying of students' core purpose wrongly promotes the foundational role of education.

Individual Responsibility

> I am not here to dismiss the value of local voices; I am simply responding to what I see as a crisis of low achievement in a province with an education administrative system that can seem too cumbersome, conflicted and adversarial to get to the urgent matters of student performance (Glaze 2018, p. 26)

Glaze (2018) avows that "while student performance may not immediately be linked to administration and governance, I strongly believe it is" (p. 14). Indeed, the first foundational principle guiding decision making is student learning and achievement. It makes sense to untangle the ways student performance expectations manifest in *Raise the Bar.*

True to neoliberal prerogatives seeking performance measures, Glaze relies on the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) to compare Nova Scotian student outcomes. Drawing on 2013 PCAP results and 2015 PISA results, Glaze (2018) wastes no time casting her judgement: "the results in these tests are simply not good enough," softening her assertion with accolades for Nova Scotian students, parents, and communities who "deserve better outcomes" (p. 15). While this fortifies individual responsibility, it mutually swells a crisis that augments a need for action for students to 'do' better.

It is critical for a neoliberal project to connect perceived effort with outcomes. Many instances in *Raise the Bar* corroborate this trajectory. For example, Glaze (2018) affirms that "changes must be made now for the good of the system as a whole and to improve outcomes for students specifically" (p. 22). The very first catalyst in *Raise the Bar* establishes to "organize the system to focus on student learning and achievement" (Glaze 2018, p. 23). Glaze (2018) augments her point on the system needing to adapt, emphasizing how "the system has simply not worked to help Nova Scotian students improve their performance" (p. 26). The undertones of inadequate student performance remain steadfast throughout *Raise the* Bar, like when Glaze (2018) states "Nova Scotian students are not doing well enough" (p. 36). Thus, according to Glaze, student achievement reflects their responsibility first and foremost, and certainly more than the production of structural forces. In effect, if the system is improved – as *Raise the Bar* contends it ought to – then individual responsibility is the reason for student performance.

Austerity and Accountability

Austerity and accountability are not explicit to neoliberalism. As Kim Allen et al., poignantly discern, the "objectives of 'austerity' align neatly with those of neo-liberalism: to discipline labour, to reduce the role of state and to redistribute income, wealth and power from labour to capital" (as cited in Gill & De Benedictis, 2016). Austerity measures are brought in as part of fiscal management. When it comes to neoliberal education reform rollouts, austerity measures are important to both schools (as public institutions) and to governments and respective Departments (responsible for annual budgets). As noted, several education documents since the mid-1990s have intertwined two independent facets, both students and the economy. Using buzz words such as 'employability,' neoliberalism has undeniably linked student outcomes to the capacity of the provincial markets.

In *Raise the Bar*, recommendation 10 hinges entirely on austerity, "provide support for accounting and financial functions in schools, rather than making them the

responsibility of principals" (Glaze 2018, p. 34). In addition, it is noted as a "common sense approach," using neoliberal terminology to naturalize austerity measures. The ability for increased management to take deeper hold comes from statements affirming the need, such as Glaze (2018) noting student performance results as "simply not good enough" (p. 15).

First, austerity and accountability measures are seen in new forms of surveillance. The observation of school activities demonstrates the pervasive expectations for students and teachers to be perform and take accountability, even without direct state oversight (Gill & De Benedictis, 2016). Even something like a title, though relatively minute, can illuminate austerity measures in neoliberal education reforms. For instance, Glaze (2018) suggests that Superintendents (of school boards) will now be referred to as "Regional Executive Directors of Education" stating the rebrand comes with "enhanced as leaders of education in their regions, responsible and accountable for student achievement, reporting directly to the Deputy Minister of EECD, overseeing regional education offices, and key to the success of School Advisory Councils in their regions" (p. 25). The keywords in the description harken neoliberal austerity terms, such as leaders, responsible, accountable, achievement, and "the key to the success."

The most revealing austerity and accountability measure in *Raise the Bar* comes from recommendation 7, to create a provincial regulatory body for teachers. Marketed as "helping to improve public confidence" and "to license, govern, discipline and regulate the teaching profession," (Glaze 2018, p. 33), the idea of an independent body is to monitor teachers. Glaze points to the Department in a dual role of both licensing and disciplining teachers, meaning there is a conflict of interest. The austerity measure herein implies that, with external supervision, the system will improve. Glaze (2018) reflects how "this recommendation should not be seen as a blanket rejection of all elected school boards in Nova Scotia and trustees" on account that "the system has simply not worked to improve their performance" (p. 26). What Raise the Bar infers, then, is the responsibility on teachers for student performance, outright stating how improved regulation for teachers will change the system from one that does not work towards a seemingly upgraded version. Make no

mistake. The role of an independent body is indistinguishably an accountability measure, most evident when Glaze unambiguously shares that, under the new system, the NSTU will not handle teacher discipline any longer (Glaze 2018, p. 34).

Students are not left out of surveillance and austerity measures. Recommendation 14 writes to "create an independent Student Progress Assessment Office (SPAO), taking responsibility away from the EECD, and establish an assessment division to develop high-quality student assessments, reporting directly to the public on province-wide results, and ensuring the assessments are aligned with the curriculum" (Glaze 2018, p. 36). On account of EECD who "does not enjoy the full trust of Nova Scotians to fulfill this role," Glaze (2018) affirms credibility in the new office to produce and analyze research and is tasked to "make recommendations without perceived bias or interference" (p. 36). In both cases of students and teachers, the idea of surveillance systems is presented as a public service, where the roles will now perform differently with dedicated observation.

Efficiency

Neoliberalism thrives in the guise of efficiency. It is a demonstration of managerial systems in good working order. Two of the seven supporting principles in *Raise the Bar* directly address efficiency. First, "integration, alignment and coherence" and second, "efficiency and effectiveness" (Glaze 2018, pp. 5-6). Even so, of the twenty-two recommendations, five address efficiency. Glaze (2018) cites a "duality and push-pull" of elected board members, citing the challenge to uphold the community needs by the people who elected them with the ultimate requirement for the role to be responsible to the Minister and Department under the Education Act (p. 3).

The first and most profound recommendation in *Raise the Bar*, to remove school boards, is referred to as "shift[ing] from a system of nine disconnected silos to one coherent, aligned model, focused on student learning and achievement" (Glaze 2018, p. 13). That is, removing school boards is buttressed as a means to be more efficient and,

therefore, improve student learning and achievement. Pointing to the Nova Scotia School Boards Association's report (in the draft at the time), Glaze (2018) points to the association's view of role confusion, specifically between the board and superintendent because of obfuscated management and government policies (p. 3). As such, Glaze (2018) writes of her concern that board members take on larger geographic areas, and thus, responsibility to a broader cache of schools, teachers, and parents (p. 13). In addition, Glaze (2018) situates this position in the original impetus to create school boards whereby the municipality could not take on the educational issues, noting that "they can sometimes operate walled off from the rest of local political and civic leadership" (p. 13). Note how the consolidation of school boards is augmented in a myriad of ways so as to establish indisputable need.

Raise the Bar widens the scope of school boards to consider the contentions by other provinces, noting school district amalgamations directly reducing the number of school board members (Glaze 2018, p. 13). Such initiatives to remove school boards are not new. Galway & Sheppard (2013) examine the role and implications in centralizing school boards, a common occurrence during the last two decades in many Canadian provinces. In underscoring the benefits of centralizing school decisions to be efficient, Glaze (2018) affirms how "building a coherent system will also allow teachers and resources to move more quickly and readily across the system to ensure equity in student outcomes" (p. 23). Equipped with the goal to improve operational efficiency, district consolidation results in fewer school boards and larger regions in the restructuring process.

Some of the efficiency recommendations are welcomed, such as recommendation 10, to "provide support for accounting and financial functions in schools, rather than making them the responsibility of principals" (Glaze 2018, p. 34). This offloads financial obligations from principals to people with the skills to carry out the tasks. Similarly, the recommendation for teachers to "have the mobility and choice to work in any region in Nova Scotia by removing barriers in collective agreements while maintaining seniority rights" (Glaze 2018, p. 35), is embraced by teachers who now have less barriers should

they decide to move within the province. Another recommendation is highly anticipated but has not been effectively implemented.

The frustration of educational decisions and policymaking by political pundits, rather than by professionals in the education system, is widely acknowledged throughout Glaze's report. The most common survey result for the first question on how administration can be improved was to "streamline the education system/invest more in schools" (Glaze 2018, p. 18). Strategically rooting in public perception, Glaze effectively bolsters how efficiency is not just an abstract idea but rooted in many perspectives. Accordingly, the striking degree of efficient-oriented measures most likely mirrors the perceived need to improve weak administration in education systems. Such nuances can be seen elsewhere in *Raise the Bar.* Another example of efficiency is recommendation four, to "encourage cross-fertilization between the Department and schools, bringing in classroom teachers to fill 50 percent of EECD curriculum positions and deploying Department staff in the system. (Glaze 2018, p. 31). Fittingly, Glaze addresses a perceived need and playing to the requirement of common-sense. Thus, Glaze's recommendation attempts to bridge policymakers with the lived experiences in schools as an effort to minimize the disconnect between policy and practice.

Equity

Varying degrees touting equitable outcomes weave throughout *Raise the Bar.* Displayed in both subtle and in more obvious ways, the commitment to inclusion is sure to be found. For instance, the fifth catalyst is to "ensure equity and excellence in all schools across the province" (Glaze 2018, p. 37). Commenting on student performance, Glaze (2018) problematizes how the "significant[ly] lower" achievement for African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw students requires attention (p. 15). In addition, Glaze's survey results made distinct calls for better representation. Across multiple social groups and intersecting identities, the need for inclusion remained consistent.

Recognizing the need for adequate representation, Glaze (2018) recommends the EECD create leadership positions "of influence and decision-making power for African Nova Scotian Achievement and Mi'kmaw Education" (p. 37). Acknowledging progress made, Glaze (2018) affirms that African Nova Scotians and Mi'kmaw voices "need to be at the decision-making table at the highest level" (p. 37). Likewise, Glaze openly calls for the Department to "do more to ensure that staff at all levels truly reflect the diversity of Nova Scotia" (Glaze 2018, p. 37). A call for more Mi'kmaw, Acadian and African Nova Scotian teachers reinforces the need for diversity at all levels in the education system. Remaining consistent, Glaze utilizes a diverse approach in gathering her data, seeking input during consultations with youth offenders, high school students, groups and associations representing social groups (like students from a Nova Scotia Youth Facility in Waterville and Nova Scotia Small Schools Initiative). Problematically, Glaze fails to adequately address how recommendations in *Raise the Bar* will address performance improvement for all students, including African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw students (Thompson and Rutkowski, 2018).

Chapter 7: Discussion

Neoliberalism is anything but a flattering expression (Boas and Gans-Morse 2009, p. 147). While policymakers and administrators do not explicitly claim to make a neoliberal document, it can – and is – still done without the label. Instead, buzz words like accountability and efficiency signal neoliberalism. Development of neoliberal policy, instead, speaks in terms of efficiency, accountability, and responsibility (Ambrosio, 2013; Apple, 2001; Ball, 2016; Taylor, 2020; Harvey, 2005). This discussion reveals the implications of Glaze's recommendations.

Gale (2001) affirms that "analysts do not enter policy fields with 'blank slates'" (p. 384). Though widely agreed the education system need improvement, solutions presented (including, but not limited to. those in *Raise the Bar*) are recycled problems redressed in the present. One need not look too far to see recent examples. In summer of 2021, the electoral platform by the Nova Scotia Progressive Conservatives secured a majority government. One of the electoral promises was reinstate school boards (Houston, 2021). As a reminder, the swift abolishment of school boards in 2018 following *Raise the Bar* was only three years prior.

(Re)producing Inequity

Published in *Raise the Bar*, Glaze (2018) maintains that recommendations for Nova Scotia's education system are geared to transform the province's students' "into the national and global leaders they must become" (p. 3). Reiteration is required to establish Glaze's assertion that *students* need changes to the current education system. Responding to the one-size-fits-all approach Glaze purports ascribing students as national and global leaders, Freire (2018) would argue that the recommendations Glaze provides are oppressive because it prevents students from being more fully human (p. 57). Inclusivity in *Raise the Bar* for marginalized students comes from statements such as "Nova Scotia students are not doing well enough, and the 'achievement gap' for African Nova Scotian and

Mi'kmaw students is a persistent and troubling problem that must be addressed" (Glaze 2018, p. 36). Understandably, such statements bring more questions than answers, given the ways to improve student scores remain unanswered.

Mainstream curriculum (re)produces inequities by framing knowledge from advantaged by those who create the documents. The mainstream curriculum is developed by those with access to knowledge and resources. Importantly, in doing so, knowledge is placed increasingly out of reach for students without access to knowledge and resources, which Rowe (2019) refers to as *knowledge-based capital* (p. 273). By way of the ruling class making every attempt to maintain their status and influence, knowledge is commodified. In this way, knowledge in neoliberal systems unfairly hinges on "the implied universal agenda so normalized as to become the unspoken rule, everyone apparently aspiring towards an unquestioned amorphous middle-class" leading to the reality that it is "popularly rendered invisible" (Rodd & Sanders 2018, p. 35). Closely monitoring the access of information, both through curriculum but also representations in media and official documents, is profound to neoliberal projects. Any resistance to neoliberal prerogative increases the odds of it not being carried out, so a curated presentation is crucial for reforms to occur.

Looking to Glaze's initiative to be inclusive in her research, she sought private consultations with various advocacy organizations for historically oppressed social groups, like African Nova Scotians. Yet, the only ways marginalized lived experiences are shared is through two means, both largely superficial. First, Glaze seeks to speak with the groups to be inclusive but does not include any further information about what constitutes inclusion. Second, Glaze brings in student performance scores to reinforce how the education system continues to fail the Indigenous and African Nova Scotian students, families, and communities. Participation through consultations or completing the survey were the two means for the research to move beyond representation by standardized test results. These initiatives are vital for improving representation (Apple, 2001; Sjøberg, 2019; Rodd & Sanders, 2018) but can be markedly improved with the resources (like time) to do so.

Of course, appealing to the 'amorphous middle-class' serves the needs of the oppressors (Freire 2018, p. 73). Neoliberalism functions on the misconception of the middle-class as synonymous with the literal understanding of the middle as equal. Specifically, this fallacy innately sees the class above or below middle can be within reach; however, this façade is false generosity, a term Freire (2018) refers to when something is given lip service without addressing the root cause or problem (p. 44). Nonetheless, sustaining neoliberalism rests on strategic approaches to social issues to shift blame and understand the core of the issue as required while professing equality for all. In truth, the apparatus best serves the upper economic echelon of society whose interests begin and end with themselves. Chomsky and Waterstone (2021) note how "the ruled must believe that the rulers are operating in their interest." Likewise, Harvey (2005) argues that "the neoliberal presumption of perfect information and a level playing field for competition appears as either innocently utopian or a deliberate obfuscation of processes that will lead to the concentration of wealth and, therefore, the restoration of class power." False charity is essential in this context, in that Freire (2018) sustains oppressive conditions hinge on false generosity, referring to a hope that oppressors can strategically use to reinforce the ruling class prerogative.

Lacking Integrity

Dr. Glaze has received criticism for the substantial recommendations based on relatively minimal evidence. In addition to utilizing national and international student performance scores, Glaze's independent research was completed in its entirety in less than three months. The entire premise for recommendations derives from the two data sets and the Auditor General's Report. Reinforcements from other scholarly work pepper *Raise the Bar,* such as additional input to corroborate Glaze's assertion of school boards as impractical and, instead, the collapsing and consolidating school boards appears as common sense, for Nova Scotia would not be the first province to do so. Not just that but calls from Nova Scotians garnered through Glaze's research reinforces school boards as unsuitable to the current context.

Education experts Thompson and Rutkowski question the integrity of the Glaze findings. Their penned response came as an external review swiftly commissioned by the NSTU after Nova Scotia published *Raise the Bar*. Thompson and Rutkowski (2018) directly address gaps in Glaze's recommendations by examining the misguided priority of performativity, poor research design, and questionable ethics. They argue student performance cannot be a basis for "implementing a significant policy and changing a governance structure" (Thompson & Rutkowski, 2018). In addition, Thompson & Rutkowski (2018) declare that Glaze's "belief" equating student success to standardized testing "is not a firm basis for a radical restructuring of Nova Scotia's education system." Unsurprisingly as a neoliberal document, there is very little dialogue in *Raise the Bar* that demonstrates a genuine reflection of reality.

Glaze uses data collected between an online survey and several meetings throughout the province that provided insights from key stakeholders. While such extents to seek a diverse array of perspectives seem remarkable, even progressive, Thompson and Rutkowski (2018) detail several areas of concern in *Raise the Bar*, relating to dialogue and critical consciousness, that may not be evident at first glance. Taking a page from the government's approach to legitimacy, NSTU sought external expertise to validate its concerns, arguably hoping the government would take them more seriously.

The ethics and integrity of the online survey leave much to be desired. Thompson and Rutkowski (2018) concerningly point to gaps in addressing the implementation of *Raise the Bar*'s recommendations. Glaze collected data used to collate and analyze substantiated recommendations in a questionably short period, less than three months. Research came from two places. One is conversations with local participants, culminating in 91 separate meetings with almost 500 people. The second is an online survey. In three questions completed by approximately 1,500 participants, the first problem stems from the open-

ended questions known as "leading questions"[2] that incite bias (Thompson and Rutkowski, 2018). Finally, on the note of research design, Thompson and Rutkowski (2018) remark how it is better for an exploratory study. The methodological concerns of the research do not end here.

Glaze (2018) admits a shortcoming of her research: "firm conclusions can be difficult to ascertain from the range and depth of topics covered in the online survey" (p. 17). Despite such knowledge, recommendations based on the results knowing they were not monotonous, raise concerns. Thompson & Rutkowski (2018) rightly question the study designs specific to ethics and bias, arguing that the sample size is inappropriate to "generalize to the entire population."

Despite claims of equity, concerns of its authenticity are warranted. In the methodology of Dr. Glaze's research, it is reasonable to argue it lacked fair representation. For example, the second survey question about endorsements for education change received only 18% of responses from the "most frequent group of responses" that included teachers, early childhood educators, and researchers (Thompson and Rutkowski, 2018). Such roles are well-positioned to provide invaluable feedback that encapsulates multiple levels of understanding and oversight. With approximately 500 in-person consultations and about 1,500 survey responses, Glaze's independent research poses significant shortcomings as this sample size fails to meaningfully represent the entire province.

In the ESJ-NS report issued thirteen months after *Raise the Bar,* teachers continuously feel overwhelmed with major reform and shifts that do not come with proper support or time. There is some evidence of this concern in Glaze's report, where she cautions a slow approach in implementation. Nonetheless, it didn't happen given Bill 72 was passed six weeks after her report.

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[2] For example, "Question 1: What administrative changes should be made to the education system to ensure the focus is on the needs of students?" (Glaze 2018, p. 18).

Reception

The recommendations garnered controversy unequivocally in their reception, even though many of the recommendations themselves were not new. In an astute argument made by Bennett (2018), he noted similar recommendations to those in *Raise the Bar* can be found in the Freeman report, including "the Government introduce a more robust 'performance management system' and 'consider' removing 'supervisory staff' including principals from the union." The reception of Glaze's report did not unfold with the same ease despite compelling similarities.

Coverage and representation in the media capture the reception of Glaze's report. It is particularly helpful in examining stakeholder concerns and provides data, like direct quotes, required to assess the significance of both Glaze's report and its reception. A year after Glaze's report, a news article looked at progress, noting widespread hostile reception of the report. Sentiments indicate concerns, such as Paul Wozney, president of the NSTU, advising "there were parts of Dr. Glaze's report that the union did comment and stand behind" (Ritchie, 2019). Wozney was not alone in voicing concern.

The Council of Atlantic Provinces and Territory Teachers' Organizations (CAPPTO, 2018) announced an immediate press release frankly calling on the Nova Scotia government "to reconsider the decision to implement the recommendations in the Glaze report." NDP education critic Claudia Chender stated, "I think it's further evidence of how the minister has cherry-picked the recommendations of these reports that fit with what I can only assume is the already existing plan" (Ritchie, 2019). Bennett (once a supporter of Glaze's report) reflects on his disappointment a year later. Despite in favour of her recommendations, Bennett reflects that "the school system is managed very much as it was, but the public does not have a public voice in the form of parent participation, and we don't have the accountability structures that were promised" (as cited in Ritchie, 2019). Other responses came in the form of action. For instance, in 2019, Educators for Social Justice –

Nova Scotia (ESJ-NS) issued a survey and published a report with findings and analysis. Group advocacy illuminates innovative approaches to provide a platform for teacher voices to be heard.

With almost 300 responses, ESJ-NS analyzed the data into themes representing areas of most concern. Results are broadly summarized by "a lack of trust between the teachers and the government" as well as "ongoing, deliberate attacks on the teaching profession through failed negotiations, continuous negativity toward teachers in the press" speak to years of pent-up frustration (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, pp. 24-5). One need not question why teachers have been left out of conversations to inform education reform rollouts.

Teachers are well-positioned to provide invaluable feedback encapsulating multiple levels of understanding and oversight. In the classrooms, they know of the intricate dynamics of the system; however, including teacher perspectives threaten neoliberal education reform agendas. Harvey (2005) writes that neoliberal pundits are "profoundly suspicious" of democracy. Instead, individual rights usurp majority rule with unlikely exceptions, according to Harvey (2005), and "only possible under conditions of relative affluence coupled with a strong middle-class presence to guarantee political stability." The question becomes, what do teachers have to say that is potentially seen as threatening, then? The study completed by the advocacy group Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia bolsters the idea of teachers shouldering the policy implementation. Gathering feedback from an online survey, the majority of responses confirmed how teachers are facing mounting frustrating with decreasing support (ESJNS, 2019). Issued thirteen months after *Raise the Bar,* it stresses that teachers continuously feel overwhelmed with major reform and shifts that do not have proper support or time.

Make no mistake – teaching is predominantly female occupation. As of 2019, the NSTU acknowledged 77 percent of its 8,722 members identified as female (Rent, 2019). Given just over three-quarters of teachers are female in Nova Scotia, it is not a stretch to believe

many are also mothers. In this way, the critical feminist perspective of Gale de Saxe et al. (2020) recognizes the inequalities, noting how there are "multiple layers of discrimination teachers must overcome to advocate for themselves and their students" (p. 61). The profession of teaching, attributed to caring for children and nurturing, has continued to be attacked for the very reason women are typically considered desirable for this role. Critical feminism situates the attack on teachers as an attack on women, whereby "…these traits of sharing and co-dependence are associated with femininity while self-sufficiency and competition are associated with masculinity" (Gale de Saxe et al. 2020, p. 61).

Glaze's infamy stands strong years later, with the implications of her respective consulting and report in Nova Scotia to "serve as a warning" to other provinces hiring Dr. Glaze (Rogers and McCraken, 2021). Simply put, Glaze's efforts in Nova Scotia have been replicated in other provinces. That is, when a province hires Dr. Glaze, they are effectively signing up for her product: a neoliberal education reform.

Centralizing "Disconnected Silos"

> "Recommendation 1: Shift from a system of nine disconnected silos to one coherent, aligned model, focused on student learning and achievement" (Glaze 2018, p. 18)

As noted, several public events are shrouded in a lack of accountability and trust. Fair enough, as *Raise the Bar* would be remiss not to highlight the myriad of strained relations in education. Events like removing the Strait Regional School Board's powers in 2008 and sequestrating control to an appointed minister until the next board election, and the protracted labour dispute between the education Department and NSTU in 2016 and 2017 (Glaze 2018, p. 8). The labour dispute is factual but *Raise the Bar* neglects (and not insignificantly) to include the first teacher walkout in the union's 144-year history (Rogers, 2018). Despite rightfully attributing events that led Glaze to assess the discombobulation of education in Nova Scotia, it is reasonably within purview to critically determine how some

events are downplayed (such as the teacher walkout) and what factors may drive such skewed prioritization of events.

Research by Dibbon, Sheppard, & Brown (2012) revealed a trend of school board operations being impeded upon by provincial governments (as cited in Galway & Sheppard 2013, p. 11). The three school board closures in Nova Scotia between 2006 and 2012 were the result of the minister's action, it is vital to note that "given the political nature of school board actions and decisions, this kind of interference evokes tensions between the boards and the governments who create and fund them" (Galway & Sheppard 2013, p. 12). Despite the impetus to improve efficiency, centralization ushers a host of implications extending beyond austerity measures. A study on school board superintendents Galway & Sheppard (2013) found that when it came to austerity, the centralization of school boards meant the transference of authority for fiscal responsibility. In the study, superintendents shared sentiments that the effect was much greater – it deteriorated the school boards connection in the community by taking local decisions away from school boards and moving fiscal authority to the state which, accordingly, could not adequately represent the regions in the way school boards often did (Galway & Sheppard, 2013).

The elements of the report about centralization include the lack of trust and chaotic nature of education events in recent history, appointed school board members' role confusion, and, more broadly, the confusion between policies for the board and superintendent. Finally, the findings challenge the role of school boards and performance results using an equity and inclusion lens. Further explanation is warranted to highlight why an equity and inclusion lens is necessary. In short: despite valorized claims to be inclusive in *Raise the Bar*, the subtle discontinuity to the commitment of inclusion throughout raises questions of false generosity. Despite claims heralding Nova Scotian students as a priority, the recommendations primarily serve the education system and those who control it. Glaze's first recommendation received significant criticism. Thompson and Rutkowski (2018) caution that "[they] want to stress that there is some benefit to advising caution when claims are made to justify significant policy change, particularly

where strong evidence-based relationships have not been established." Nonetheless, school boards swiftly folded and became Regional Education Centres Under the Education Reform Act announced by Zach Churchill, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development on March 1, 2018 (Gorman, 2018). To date, Regional Education Centres remain in effect.

Tumultuous Times in Contemporary Education

Sentiments about the frequent changes to education tend to appear both exhausted and confused. As Glaze (2018) rightly stresses, successful implementation of recommendations is vital to the success "in order to embed the changes into the fabric of the organization" (p. 41). Giving accolades to "some of the most progressive reports…seen in any school across the globe," Glaze (2018) acknowledges that "despite the current challenges, [she is] very optimistic about the future of education in Nova Scotia" (p. 41). At the same time, there has been a long history of policy theorists urging decisions for education be rooted more closely in research and evidence, with most recent years ushering in the loudest calls (Galway & Sheppard 2015, p. 5). The problem, Galway & Sheppard (2015) posit, is that educational leaders and policymakers do not rely on research so much as their own experiences and pressures.

Galway & Sheppard (2015) maintain the myriad of challenges to implementing policy. This is not new. Nonetheless, Glaze does not help the public's lack of trust amidst the turbulent years leading to *Raise the Bar*. Applying the logic from Corbett (2008) to the approach in Glaze's report *Raise the Bar* ascertains the overarching spectrum that begins and ends with a "macro" view (p. 360). Using the analogy of an aerial photograph, which can provide a picture of everything at once at that moment in time, Corbett (2008) would frame *Raise the Bar* as a purview of education to a degree where sweeping changes are provided (p. 360). Given it used performance data as the only other research outside of her own (swift) research, *Raise the Bar* professed its authority by not calling for further research to dis/prove the results. In fact, Galway & Sheppard (2015) succinctly posit that

considering decision making, the inherent problem "is overly dependent on informal, populist and experiential knowledge is that it is haphazard and fundamentally reactive, thereby inviting continuous reform and readjustment" (p. 30). Without democratic processes that are more involved in the decision-making process, education reforms risk continuing the current trend of being out of touch.

Considering absent presences (Apple, 2012), Dr. Avis Glaze's report introduces education in Nova Scotia, denoting the political makeup as well as critical events leading up to her research and subsequent report. Despite covering the chaotic history of Nova Scotia education, Glaze fails to include the full extension of tension and disagreement between NSTU and the government. One need not overthink to propose why such transparency remains incongruent with Glaze's hopeful disposition of prospective educational harmony in Nova Scotia. Furthermore, Gale (2001) illuminates the role of strategy in policy production, arguing both formal and informal context work to "achieve certain ends" and "could be restricted to specific policy actors" (p. 389). The importance of critical policy analysis illuminates what is missing and should be considered, therefore revealing what is intentionally not included in the report. By Glaze not including the full scope of the arduous relationship between teachers, NSTU and the Department suggests there is an acknowledgement of perceivable wrong doing that would be best as hidden.

Therefore, during the data collection in late 2017, the state of student learning during Glaze's research and evaluation positions students as unfit to meet their imposed potential and future objectives. There is a clear connection between students and the role of merit in an economic sense. In effect, Glaze has heralded a key motive in neoliberalism: creating and responding to a moment of crises (Peck & Tickell 2002, p. 392). Yet, when critically assessing the test scores Glaze provides, Nova Scotia competitively fared against other provinces (Rogers, 2020; Whitley & Hollweck, 2020). Most scores in the three areas of science, reading, and mathematics are the highest in Atlantic Canadian provinces.

The ESJ-NS report identifies the recommendation of a regulatory teacher college as an attack on teachers. ESJ-NS frames the recommendation as to the crux of unresolved arbitrations between the government and teachers, with Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. (2019) stating the attempt "for increased oversight and additional disciplinary measures has created an environment of mistrust and defeatism amongst teachers…" (p. 25). The report collated responses to workload and balance for teachers, summarizing the consensus of overwhelming workloads and a lack of time and support built into their workday. Notably, the most recent shift to inclusive learning makes teachers' workload unsustainable due to the lack of time and funding to support all students (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, p. 27). The report encapsulates the dire state of the teaching profession in the following passage (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, p. 28):

> Educators continually reiterate concerns about their workloads, with special attention paid to difficulties with politics and lack of trust between the government, union, and teachers, and its impacts on their personal lives over time. These tensions have built to a crescendo, to the point where some teachers are leaving the profession to seek alternative employment.

Multiple points in recent history depict the tenuous relationship between the government and teachers, from the government's firm position to not budge in negotiating the teacher contract to increasing teachers' expectations, and little regard to how policy affects practice to bring about sustainable changes.

In Nova Scotia, such sentiments are akin to common understanding across many stakeholders such as students, parents, and teachers. The provincial government has openly acknowledged such perspectives. For example, in 2015, the Nova Scotia education minister at the time, Karen Casey, recommended reform because of inadequate student testing scores; in doing so, the premise guided that the education system had "lost credibility in the eyes of many Nova Scotians" (as cited in Rogers 2018, p. 93). Creating hope as a springboard to action, just like Freire argues, Casey displayed optimism to give confidence with education reforms moving forward. Perhaps unsurprisingly, similar

recounts of optimism for change are echoed by Glaze in 2018, purporting the "common ground" of those she spoke to positions "the best interests of students at heart…is an inspiring foundation to build on" (p. 3). Applying the theory of the absent presence by Apple (2012), consider what accomplishments are between the parallel in 2015 (Casey's platform of hope amidst poor student performance) and 2018 (with Glaze's platform of hope amidst poor student performance). With the same rhetoric spaced apart by three years, all attempts lead to the same source of continued hope by focusing on the hope of (re)building. As such, the conjuring of credibility continues to unfetter any reliable traction.

Confusion

In a Canadian study of education policy, findings by Galway & Sheppard (2015) reveal that educational decision-makers continue to be primarily influenced by macro and micro-level factors. They assert "where [the] choice of policy evidence is mediated by personal considerations and political risk factors," which leads the researchers to argue that "a weak policy development paradigm that is resistant to independent research-informed evidence" (Galway & Sheppard 2015, p. 2). Likewise, Apple (2001) argues that neoliberal education reforms lack research to back their claims (p. 412); instead, the dangling carrot offers the illusion of hope through providing tangible testing scores and robust surveillance systems to monitor, track, and assess student development.

In a somewhat surprising move to bolster accountability, the Nova Scotia government hired Whitley & Hollweck (2020) on a three-year contract to carry out a developmental evaluation of the implications of recent education policy reforms.[3] Preliminary results reveal notable trends in education (for this writing). First, a system in

[3] A policy including a subsequent policy for Inclusive Education later in approved in 2019 with an effective date of September 2020. For the purposes of this paper, I have not included much detail; however, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that the policy "provides a framework which will apply to all other policies, procedures, strategies, and initiatives (Government of Nova Scotia 2019, p. 2)

flux (including anticipation) of the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders and administrators leading to confusion "regularly expressed" (Whitley & Hollweck 2020, p. 304). Considering the reports of confusion from teachers, educational leaders, and administrators, Glaze fails to account for the extent of disorder in Nova Scotia's education. Another trend by Whitley & Hollweck (2020) stems from the first, whereby students (and, particularly those with needs beyond the classroom or group setting) bear the brunt of continuous changes and confusion (Whitley & Hollweck 2020, p. 304).

The frustration with unfinished implementation of reforms, new reform announcements, and continuous "under construction" environment has worn teachers thin (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al., 2019). It's not just teachers. Even students notice, as indicated by Whitley and Hollweck (2020). Framing this in terms of the market economy, if students are akin to the consumer, teachers akin to the retailers, and the boss is akin to the ministry of education – it seems that no stakeholder is satisfied and continually looking for answers to fix the problem. Without asking critical participants in the transaction – the consumers and retailers – how can the ministry of education make sense of what is happening in the day-to-day lives of the system it intends to support?

As mentioned, Galway and Sheppard's (2015) study demonstrated that personal and political bias significantly guides policy development. Several public concerns openly ask whose interests are first. One example reflecting on Glaze's recommendations comes from NSTU president at the time, Liette Doucet, remarking, "we're not saying that changes aren't necessary. We're saying that changes are necessary, but these aren't the changes that are going to assist students" (as cited in Smith, 2018). Similarly, parents raised concerns, criticizing Glaze for "the evidence that she uses is extremely anecdotal, and it's not really quantitative in any way, shape or form" (Smith, 2018). Parents, teachers, and the teacher union repeatedly called for different approaches. One chair of a school advisory council and a proponent of the report, still has reservations. She cautions that "[she] do[es] hope that they take the time to make sure that if they're going to draft new legislation that they do it properly, that they make sure that it doesn't have any holes in it or unforeseen gaps"

(Smith, 2018). Captured here is the hope resting careful and collaborative deliberation. Taking time did not happen. Collaboration was not external to the Department.

There was swift push to legitimize Glaze's recommendations in the *Education Reform Act* (Bill 72) just six weeks after *Raise the Bar* was published (Gorman, 2018) despite vocal opposition. Such actions exemplify Harvey's (2005) contention that suppressing opposition to neoliberalism is met with persuasion, propaganda, or "when necessary, raw force." Extending the significance, Harvey (2005) draws on Polanyi's fear "that the liberal (and by extension the neoliberal) utopian project could only ultimately be sustained by resort to authoritarianism. The freedom of the masses would be restricted in favour of the freedoms of the few." The Department does this by a dearth of research to back their claims (Apple 2001, p. 412). Instead, the dangling carrot offers the illusion of hope through tangible testing scores and robust surveillance systems to monitor, track, and assess student development. Indeed, monitoring and tracking students' performance is incumbent on teachers.

Consequently, multiple layers of performance evaluation at the student level and teachers structure a surveillance culture under the guise of independence and choice. Neoliberal education reforms have successfully leveraged surveillance systems to monitor student and teacher performance. Undoubtedly, the amassed data gathering will guide future policy decisions (as and when required). The use of PISA and CPAP scores proves a reliance on 'empirical' data to give the illusion of neutral policymaking. As Galway and Sheppard's study reminds us, there is no neutrality in policymaking.

Performativity

Glaze (2018) maintains that recommendations for Nova Scotia's education system are geared to transform the province's students' "into the national and global leaders they must become" (p. 3). Reiteration is required to establish Glaze's claim that *students* need changes to the current education system. Responding to the precise one-size-fits-all approach Glaze purports that ascribes students as national and global leaders underscores

the importance of measurable results to maintain data of performance. The idea of tracking test results is packaged as a benefit, but there are few meaningful implementations to improve student performance. Inclusivity in *Raise the Bar* for marginalized students comes from statements such as "Nova Scotia students are not doing well enough, and the 'achievement gap' for African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw students is a persistent and troubling problem that must be addressed" (Glaze 2018, p. 36). Understandably, such statements bring more questions than answers, given the ways to improve student scores remain unanswered.

The education system as described by one survey response maintained it as "unwieldy, out of touch with classrooms and parents," (Glaze 2018, p. 20). Several other quoted responses highlighted in Glaze's (2018) survey echoed sentiments of a system that prioritizes self-interest over the needs of the people the system serves. Without meaningful attention to the needs of students and teachers (rather than the needs of politics and public appearances), the looming threat of eugenics warrants distinct concern. Significantly, the move toward digitized data influences education as a transaction (Rowe 2019, p. 275). The best functioning top-performing schools can be marketed for branding and much more. In addition, Rowe (2019) argues in similar language to Freire that digitized data begets consumption of schools, leading to the marketing of education where success is tangibly measured and conceptualized (p. 275). Akin to the Freirean banking model, Rowe (2019) asserts that such systems influence "education *as a transaction"* (p. 275, emphasis in original). There is a critical distinction to distinguish how performativity extends beyond standardization and measurement. Many scholars have widespread concern for how performance can often take centre stage to assess education (Sjøberg, 2019; Apple, 2001; Giroux, 2013).

Through the tumultuous years in education preceding *Raise the Bar*, media served an essential role in shaping public perceptions of schools and student performance. For example, Nova Scotia fared well in the 2013 PCAP results, fifth in a tight race (Frost, 2020). Yet, in the subcategories breaking down provincial scores to a national standard, Nova

Scotia did exceptional in science with average scores with 91 percent who met the benchmark of success, close behind Alberta (at 93 percent) and at the same as BC (also at 91 percent) (Glaze, 2018). Frost (2020) recounts the media portrayal, where "one would have expected that such an achievement would have been, if not cause for celebration, at least cause for a bit of self-satisfied back patting. Not so." The focus highlighted what could have been improved (math scores) instead of the strong performance in science. Headlines like "Canada's Fall in Math-Education Ranking Sets off Alarm Bells" (Alphonso, 2013) and "NS students doing better in math but not up to national average" (CBC News, 2014) unequivocally demonstrate the alarmist culture around student performance.

Maintaining the Status Quo

Mainstream curriculum (re)produces inequities by framing knowledge from advantaged by those who create the documents. The mainstream curriculum is developed by those with access to knowledge and resources. Importantly, in doing so, knowledge is placed increasingly out of reach for students without access to knowledge and resources, which Rowe (2019) refers to as *knowledge-based capital* (p. 273). In this way, the dichotomy of knowledge in neoliberal systems unfairly hinges on "the implied universal agenda so normalized as to become the unspoken rule, everyone apparently aspiring towards an unquestioned amorphous middle-class" leading to the reality that it is "popularly rendered invisible" (Rodd 2018, p. 35). Indeed, another absent presence in *Raise the Bar* by Thompson and Rutkowski (2018), vocalizes concern as "no attempt is made to show how each specific recommendation will improve student achievement." Gale de Saxe et al. (2020) tellingly reveals the quantifiable and standardization leading to continuous competition (p. 54):

> These goals allow a neoliberal ideology to seep its way into the fabric of education, framing it as a competition where standardization and individualism drive not only teaching and learning but also the manner in which success and quality are socially constructed, so that private is seen as superior to public.

The Freirean terminology of "class consciousness" is relevant here because inadequate education systems fail to recognize the vast perspectives, experiences, and circumstances that social class denies or provides, thereby insidiously excluding outliers (Freire 2018, p. 164). Statements from Glaze's (2018) research support the concern among folks, recounting "a theme throughout the consultations: Department staff would 'walk a mile in our shoes' and truly experience what is happening in today's classrooms" (p. 31). Despite the third recommendation to "encourage cross-fertilization between the Department and schools," it has not gained traction. Another neglect was disregarding teachers by the Department.

Given the extensive data from students and teachers alike, perhaps the Department considers this data an appropriate substitution for 'cross fertilization.' It is deeply problematic to rely on data in place of meaningful conversation and experiences. Rowe (2019) maintains that in the height of increasing dependence on complex algorithms in digital technology, such "measurements disadvantage Indigenous children and minority racial groups, in addition to children living in poverty" (p. 275). The Department utilizes data instead of 'cross-fertilization' and chooses specific initiatives for inclusion, in unsurprising ways – more policy.

Additions to core elements of Glaze's report aim to improve inclusion. MacLean (2021) reports the Inclusive Education Policy effective since September 2020 "… includes a commitment to providing students with disabilities direct access to learning supports like speech pathology and occupational therapy." With the support of their doctor, Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) finally provided an alternative to in-person learning, which the parents state was "eventually provided…in the form of 15 minutes of schooling a day" (MacLean, 2021). Situations like this are pushed aside and given little attention, with the focus on "schools are safe" (link from below) and Nova Scotia's top doctor stating that "if necessary" public health measures will adapt "to minimize risks to students and educators" (MacLean, 2021). Another neoliberal rhetoric is offering the illusion of the 'right' course of action while not appropriately committing to it. Data collection obfuscates

the genuine and important vulnerable students who are not prioritized over the needs of the majority.

One tenable suggestion provided by Taylor (2020) argues that silence – which can be used in dehumanizing ways – can be reconstituted as a step towards humanizing education (p. 9). To do so, Taylor (2020) asserts that teachers can use intentional silence in a liberating way by allowing students pockets of time where productivity is not measured, and quiet space can be used to explore their thoughts. In doing this, Taylor (2020) posits that even if briefly, it is possible to provide space for students "to be and become fully human in that moment" (p. 9). Indeed, extending empathy in their critical review of *Raise the Bar*, Thompson & Rutkowski (2018) note how "it is unclear if [Glaze] was aware of the gravity that her recommendations held," signalling the importance of Freire's dialogue. Without dialogue, ignorance is (re)produced. Recommendations in *Raise the Bar* remain anything but liberatory.

Freire (2018) maintains oppressors aim to change the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation itself, given that "the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated" (p. 74). As such, Freire may point to how the dehumanizing conditions of marginalized students are possible. Critical feminist approaches engage an intersectional framework to cognize oppression facing teacher experiences (see Connell, 2011; Gale de Saxe et al., 2020; Taylor, 2020). Neoliberalism functions on the misconception of the middle-class as synonymous with the literal understanding of the middle as equal. Specifically, this fallacy innately sees the class above or below middle can be within reach; however, this façade is false generosity, a term Freire (2018) refers to when something is given lip service without addressing the root cause or problem (p. 44). Of course, appealing to the amorphous-middle class is because it serves the needs of the oppressors (Freire 2018, p. 73). Harvey (2005) maintains neoliberal gurus typically feel threatened by democracy. The interests of the ruling class (and anything to sustain its power and influence) outweigh the needs of the majority.

Freire (2018) sustains oppressive conditions hinge on false generosity, referring to a hope that oppressors can strategically reinforce their motivation. Neoliberal education reforms implicitly and tactfully place students and teachers as objects in a structure rather than receiving a significant service to improve their lives. Students and teachers are frequently not privy to 'how the system works' unless it fits on the horizon of becoming an asset to the market. Several educational reports and policies since the 1990s sustain student marketability, and *Raise the Bar* is no exception. For example, Glaze (2018) highlights a response to her survey (p. 19):

> We need a government that will listen, and a department that has the interest of students and teachers as a top priority. Students are suffering from a government that won't listen. There is a reason why Nova Scotia is so far behind education-wise compared to the rest of the country...Nova Scotia is not preparing its students for the future.

As described, and a common theme in the literature, reflect systems that focus on educational outcomes without listening to the very students and teachers who are, or recently were, in schools. Choosing to not listen to key informants in education serves to maintain the oppressor's power and its associated benefits. An essential requirement for education to be liberating is fostering *conscientização;* however, this remains an impossible feat with Bill 72. Under current education legislation, students must fit into the system as measurable products. Knowledge and success acquired fits to serve the needs of Department (read: state) priorities and not the benefit of students.

During Glaze's data collection in late 2017, the state of student learning positions students as unfit to meet their imposed potential and future objectives. There is a clear connection between students and the role of merit in an economic sense. In effect, Glaze has heralded a key motive in neoliberalism: creating and responding to a moment of crises (Peck & Tickell 2002, p. 392; Harvey, 2005; Chomsky & Waterstone, 2021). Yet, when critically assessing the test scores Glaze provides, Nova Scotia competitively fared against other provinces (Rogers, 2020; Whitley & Hollweck 2020, p. 300). There are celebratory

milestones completely amiss, such as most scores in the three areas of science, reading, and mathematics represented the highest in Atlantic Canadian provinces.

The Attack on Teachers: Regulating the Teaching Profession

> "Recommendation 7: Create a provincial College of Educators, an independent body to license, govern, discipline and regulate the teaching profession, helping to improve public confidence in the education system across the province" (Glaze 2018, p. 33)

The recommendation for regulating the teaching profession directs cites removing some of the responsibilities currently held by the Department (like teacher certification) and by the NSTU (like discipline) (Glaze 2018, p. 33). Noteworthy here, in the first sentence of Glaze's reasoning for the recommendation, she hooks into neoliberal austerity measures of surveillance and individual responsibility while upholding the province's monopoly of power and control. As Harvey (2005) frankly argues, critical decisions for the state are best when made possible through limits on democratic governance. As such, Harvey (2005) asserts, "this creates the paradox of intense state interventions and government by elites and 'experts' in a world where the state is supposed not to be interventionist." The government's attempt to squander the union's powers should be no surprise. Glaze (2018) bolsters the College would be "impartial and without conflict of interest when a group is in charge of both negotiating its membership needs and overseeing discipline" (p. 33). Championed for its alleged neutrality, Glaze asserts that the College would be guided by the Education Act and a government-appointed Registrar. Arguably, it is questionable how neutral a government appointed position can be. Herein lies a poignant demonstration of the neoliberal paradox Harvey (2005) is widely quoted for:

> It has been part of the genius of neoliberal theory to provide a benevolent marks full of wonderful words like freedom, liberty, choice, and rights, to hide from the grim realities of the restoration or

> reconstitution of naked class power, locally as well as transnationally…

Fundamentally, Glaze's assertion that regulating teachers will improve performance fails to acknowledge who benefits – the ruling class – equipped with resources and influence, and thus benefits by maintaining the status quo. With regulation comes more bureaucracy, surveillance, and data for the Department to thwart as it sees fit. Consider the ruthless actions by the government to proceed with Glaze's recommendations. Minister Churchill argued that slowing the reform was not acceptable, "we do need to move forward with the reform. Our kids can't wait," he affirmed (as cited in Alphonso, 2018). Three provinces have policies on teacher misconduct requiring public disclosure (at the time of Glaze's report) (Bennett, 2018). Of these three provinces, both Ontario and BC protocol mandates cases and decisions are public.

A broader context is required here. There is a relentless attack on teachers (and not just in Nova Scotia). As will be demonstrated, the teaching profession relies on several skills and duties. The attack on teachers hinges on viewing the multi-faceted role teachers face as an opportunity to reinforce neoliberal cornerstones of "performance, efficiency, and effectiveness" (Rogers, 2020) directly onto teachers through creating a regulatory college. Given teachers' stewardship in the classroom and influence on youth and youth development, teachers are seen as ideally positioned to shoulder the neoliberal agenda. Problematically, teachers (and therefore students) continue to suffer. Glaze's recommendation of a teacher's College widens the levee in the tumultuous relationship between teachers and the Department.

Teachers continue to experience stacking responsibility in classrooms to meet the needs of students (Whitley & Hollweck 2020, p. 304). As an overarching trend in Whitley & Hollweck's (2020) report, the nuances of change in a climate of increasing responsibility and accountability lead to teachers' confusion and frustration. Students, parents, and the community bear witness to the shortcomings through the commitment of teachers, though well-intentioned, performing technical drifting. An example of this by a Halifax principal

(and former teacher), Derek Carter, who details the loss of satisfaction as teachers experience less time with students and more time meeting bureaucratic requirements tracking progress (Nova Scotia Teacher's Union, 2018b). In sum, to entertain – let alone condone – local and recent education reforms as equitable simply holds no veracity.

Measuring the Performance of Performance

After the contract became effective in 2017, teachers vocalized concerns, including inadequate resources to assist students in need, overwhelming administration tasks like data entry, and violence in the workplace, to state a few misgivings (Gorman, 2017). More recently, teachers and administrators in Nova Scotia "displayed frustrations with being in a system in a state of perpetual reform" (Rogers 2018, p. 101). While it is commendable for teachers to voice their concerns and a central feature of democracy, it must be made clear that teachers often face sombre implications for doing so.

The teacher disputes between 2015 to 2018 saw many initiatives at the cost of teacher's time and energy, such as added expectations for data collection and reporting, a new real-time online grading system (meaning that students and parents could access grades as teachers enter them), and a change to how report cards comments were to be made (Frost, 2020). Despite providing a rationale for newly adopted prerogatives, the Department did not equip teachers with the knowledge and tools to carry out the new duties. Frost (2020) shares how "when it came to data collection and collation, teachers often found that they did not understand what they were collecting, or even, in many cases, why." Expectations were for teachers to connect the school development goals to all aspects of the curriculum, although no blueprint of what that would look like was offered. The confusion lay not just with teachers, but parents, too. The new marking system provided no overarching 'bridging' to manage parents' expectations. As such, the responsibility fell on teachers. With the increased demand from parents came the cost for more of the teacher's time.

Gill & De Benedictis (2016) argue that new forms of surveillance have a dual-pronged capacity as far as austerity measures go. First, the deregulation of the state occurs when surveillance alleviates physical presence and, simultaneously, provides a wealth of data to be drawn from at any time. Second, the state imposes on private life, such as student learning, in the process of observation. Gill & De Benedictis (2016) note surveillance in private life is not restricted to education, but also health care, banking, and much more. Surveillance, through the lens of austerity measures, leads to the exacerbation of the inequities marginalized people face, through reproducing and maintaining gender, social class, and 'race' (Gill & De Benedictis, 2016).

The Meritocracy of Professional Development

Reading between the lines, Glaze (2018) addresses the merit of courses in her recommendation, stating professional development would be reviewed by the College every five years to demonstrate "that they have continued their own education by taking accredited courses, aligned with departmental and school priorities" (p. 33). Glaze asserts the inculcation by the provincial government in professional development as a specific response to a highly public debate that jeopardized the legitimacy of the government. By stipulating teachers are 'free' to pursue their professional development, Glaze leaves no room for interpretation, noting the alignment required to augment her recommendation.

As noted in student performance, during the tumultuous years in education before *Raise the Bar*, media shaped public perceptions. Teachers were no exception. The following story reveals lash back at teachers seeking to improve their professional development (a standard in many professions). By way of context, teachers in Nova Scotia receive compensation based on two factors: years of experience and qualifications (Frost, 2020). One means to increase a teacher's salary increase comes with permanent contracts comes automatic annual pay increases for the first decade. Another way to increase teaching compensation is through additional qualifications. Where the latter is concerned, teachers can take degrees or diploma programs through Department-accredited post-secondary

teachers. Either way, teachers must apply and receive approval from the Department of Education, and, upon completion, salary increases improve for the next three years (Frost, 2020). Relatively straightforward, one would presume.

The media begged to differ. In 2014 to 2015, teacher's professional development became public concern. Despite teachers enrolled in Drake University before April 2014 receiving assurance they could continue studying under the previous agreement, the minister changed courses of action less than a year later. The public response to a different topic in the media put all educational woes back in the spotlight. This is significant. The vulnerability of the education system, criticized one account, swiftly morphed into other (and unrelated) concerns. Both public and Department responses to media criticisms demonstrate the volatility of both schools and the public.

Teacher Voices

Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia (ESJ-NS) came to fruition in 2015 as a partisan advocacy group comprised of a variety of volunteers, including teachers, college faculty members, university professors, independent educators, and parents whose objective is to improve social justice in the schools and communities (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al., 2019). The independent research by ESJ-NS sought to bring forth teachers' opinions since the Glaze report did not include many perspectives from the classroom. A survey with almost 300 responses included "a lack of trust between the teachers and the government" as well as "ongoing, deliberate attacks on the teaching profession through failed negotiations, continuous negativity toward teachers in the press" speak to years of pent-up frustration (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, pp. 24-5). The report identifies one recommendation from the Glaze report was also an attack on teachers – the regulatory College – as a crux of unresolved arbitrations between the government and teachers, stating the attempt "for increased oversight and additional disciplinary measures has created an environment of mistrust and defeatism amongst teachers…" (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, p. 25).

The report collated responses to workload and balance for teachers, summarizing the consensus of overwhelming workloads and a lack of time and support built into their workday. Importantly, the most recent shift to inclusive learning is presented by teachers as adding to their workload in a way that cannot be met due to the lacking time and funding to support all students (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, p. 27). The report encapsulates the dire state of the teaching profession in the following passage (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, p. 28):

> Educators continually reiterate concerns about their workloads, with special attention paid to difficulties with politics and lack of trust between the government, union, and teachers, and its impacts on their personal lives over time. These tensions have built to a crescendo, to the point where some teachers are leaving the profession to seek alternative employment.

Multiple points in recent history depict the tenuous relationship between the government and teachers, from the government's firm position to not budge in negotiating the teacher contract to increasing teachers' expectations, and little regard to how policy affects practice to bring about sustainable changes.

The partisan advocacy group Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia produced a report discussing survey results of 291 teachers a year after the Glaze report was published. In the discussion, the report reframes the 3Rs: Renew, Refocus, Respect as a nod to the Liberal government's five-year plan to reform education in 2015 titled *The 3Rs: Renew, Refocus, Rebuild – Nova Scotia's Action Plan for Education* (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, p. 31). Under the topic of Renew, ESJ-NS asserted teachers want a renewed commitment to "a well-funded education system in Nova Scotia" (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, p. 31). Expanding funding for inclusion (such as proper time, supports, and specialists for schools), professional development, and renewed support for education specialists like guidance councillors and speech pathologists, proposed among others (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, p. 31). Considering Refocus, ESJ-NS recommended "narrow education reform to

focus only on essential changes; focus on educators' strengths" (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, p. 32). Under this topic, criticism of the reform and continuous change takes place (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, p. 32):

> Teachers discussed how never-ending education reform wreaks havoc on the system. Refocus reform and determine whether: a) it is necessary; b) grounded in research; and c) grounded in best practices.

In addition, a slow implementation for new aspects unapologetically requested, noting that "piecemeal" approach where before the entire 2015 plan came to fruition (as described in 3Rs), another plan is in creation (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, p. 32). Specifically, the report asks to "slow down, evaluate what has worked, what has not worked, and listen to teachers' experiences to refocus on what is essential" (Educators for Social Justice – Nova Scotia et al. 2019, p. 32). The recommendations in the report provide a platform for teacher voices to be heard, a vital inclusion so often missed. Considering teacher identity and professionalism, Ball (2016) argues that such conditions exacerbate "complex and powerful relationships" (p. 1052) by surveillance and evaluation of monitoring, which wrongly employs the terms performativity and productivity as synonymous.

Why The Controversy?

In examining the historical context leading to the education reform, Basu (2004) notes a socio-politically tense period in Ontario during the Common-sense Revolution, arguing that the "rationalization of neoliberal discourse" promulgated a "perceived need" justifying significant "structural readjustments" in the education system (p. 621). Likewise, in Nova Scotia, Rogers (2020) reasons the perceived requirement for education reform as "alarmist," noting that the justification was wrongly premised. Improvement of student testing scores was objectively incorrect, given Nova Scotia placed third in all Canadian provinces and remained competitive globally (Rogers, 2020). In the case of both Ontario

and Nova Scotia, neoliberal agendas promoted the benefits of education reform as an actionable means to respond to current needs (and therefore, allegedly, responsible).

In all research thus far, the most overlooked element of controversy remains arguably one of the most important and is directly related to Gramsci's concept of hegemony. After all, Chomsky and Waterstone (2021) frame hegemony as the way the government gains the consent of the governed. Moreover, it is a "very potent form of power" possible only when coupled with legitimacy (Chomsky and Waterstone, 2021). Suggesting impartiality, the Liberal government hired Dr. Avis Glaze, an out-of-province educational consultant, to review Nova Scotian education in late 2017. The *Action Plan* was Liberals released not long before commissioning Glaze, where Frost (2020) notes she is "one of the few experts quoted…suggesting a pre-existing connection between Glaze and the governing Liberals before her appointment was announced." Resituating the events within a timeline helps to cement concerns of collusion. In October 2017, it was announced that Dr. Glaze was hired, and results would be forthcoming before the end of the year (CAPTTO, 2018). The coordination and planned execution of Dr. Glaze's recommendations reinforces a morally dubious partnership between the Liberals and their choice of a consultant.

To be clear, a short-term contract, like Dr. Glaze's tenure (from October 17, 2017, to December 31, 2017, inclusive), is candidly neoliberal (Harvey, 2005), on account of the flexibility it provides through the splintering credibility and responsibility for the fall out from Glaze's report. Of crucial importance, according to Harvey (2005), such tactics are to be employed to reinforce the organization in power forthrightly. In this case, the power rests with the provincial government. The appearance of legitimacy is no mistake; it's the opposite. Bringing in an educational consultant appears to be in their best interest to the public. Despite numerous attempts, nothing else worked to promulgate reforms previously (Rogers, 2018). In this sense, Chomsky and Waterstone (2021) rightfully acknowledge a powerful tool used to keep power in the hands of those with power – legitimacy.

Changes to education are needed but there is a lack of consensus on what to do. While it can be recognized that this system does not work, finding options that would work proves to be much more difficult. A Freirean lens would consider this a *limit-situation*, where the social actors at the time are unable to see beyond their situation (Freire 2018, p. 109). Without paths to liberation through problem-posing education, a fragmented education system that inadequately meets the needs of Nova Scotia students, teachers, schools, communities, and families remains. Ideas for improvement continue to acknowledge that the system is in dismal shape. Specifically, the educational consultant and professor Michael Corbett (2008, p. 354), a former schoolteacher, provides the scope of disarray:

> I have also been troubled by conversations with colleagues, educational bureaucrats, support people, administrators and politicians who are also scrambling toward the same kind of standardizable educational measurement, even though many of them recognize the myriad problems, nonsense, and casualties associated with the whole enterprise.

Published in *Raise the Bar*, Glaze (2018) maintains that recommendations for Nova Scotia's education system are geared to transform the province's students' "into the national and global leaders they must become" (p. 3). Reiteration is required to establish Glaze's assertion that *students* need changes to the current education system. Responding to the precise one-size-fits-all approach Glaze purports that ascribes students as national and global leaders, Freire (2018) would argue that the recommendations Glaze provides are oppressive because it prevents students from being more fully human (p. 57). Finally, as a nod to Gramsci (1971), Zimmerman (2018) reminds us that caution fits here as "institutionalized intellectuals are rarely as autonomous as we believe ourselves to be" (p. 356).

Dialogue of criticisms has been endorsed and silently reprimanded to varying degrees. Without feeling heard, increasingly intense waves of voices expressing concern and frustration from teachers and educational leaders continue to weave in and out of the spotlight. At the heart of circumstances are the aspects of technical drifting – in terms of performance, surveillance, and the bureaucracy of schools – that negatively contribute to

job satisfaction and student well-being. From a teacher perspective, Rogers (2020), in their experience as a social sciences teacher during the early 2000s, recounts that "what was considered important in schools had become narrowly focused on testing results, and quantifiable figures, with accountability measures for educators to monitor and track progress" (p. 4). As an educational leader, Rogers was not alone. The study by Taylor (2020) exemplifies how outside of the prescribed standards of success that relate to productivity and efficiency, student needs cannot be adequately responded to effectively.

Not surprisingly, continuous structural change and adaptations facilitate a culture in flux where shifting responsibilities and priorities can quickly become tangential. Developing schools and education systems to respond to current needs is not the problem. Instead, issues arise from conflating preferences driving neoliberal education reforms. In *Raise the Bar,* Glaze (2018) shares her firm belief "that Nova Scotia's education system must have students at the centre" (p. 4). Perhaps students 'at the centre' needs to be defined. It is unclear if Glaze means the centre of the Department's objectives or the centre of knowledge and development of children and youth. More recent evidence suggests the former, where preliminary results from the provincial education study in 2020 indicate students are not the recipients of focus (Whitley and Hollweck, 2020).

The key recommendations by the two of the most recent educational reviews, Status Quo (2014) and *Raise the Bar* (2018), mirror current rhetoric by Premier Houston and in EECD's publication in September 2021 as part of the *Accountability Report 2020-21: Education and Early Childhood Development* (Education and Early Childhood Development, 2021b). Applying the logic from Corbett (2008) to the approach in Glaze's report *Raise the Bar* ascertains the overarching spectrum that begins and ends with a "macro" view (p. 360). Using the analogy of an aerial photograph, which can provide a picture of everything at once at that moment in time, Corbett (2008) would frame Glaze's report as a purview of education to a degree where sweeping changes are provided (p. 360). Given it used performance data as the only other research outside of her own (swift) research, *Raise the Bar* professed its authority by not calling for further research to dis/prove the results. In

fact, in considering decision making, Galway & Sheppard (2015) succinctly posit that the inherent problem is that it "is overly dependent on informal, populist and experiential knowledge is that it is haphazard and fundamentally reactive, thereby inviting continuous reform and readjustment" (p. 30). Without democratic processes that are more involved in the decision-making process, education reforms risk continuing the current trend of being out of touch.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This thesis has argued the myriad ways Glaze's (2018) research, analysis, and recommendations refute the very premise that she opens her report with, to provide "118,000 Nova Scotian students — with the support they need, equitable outcomes and excellence in teaching, learning, and leadership" (p. 1). In this sense, a Freirean one, Glaze acts as an extension of the state as an oppressor, whereas students are oppressed as defined by Freire, in that their potential must be within neoliberal confines that ultimately (re)produces dehumanizing conditions that are unsustainable and inequitable. Importantly, Glaze is not isolated in this position. As Rogers (2018) notes, curriculum, accountability, testing, and competition in the provincial economy are driving forces and appear in every single education policy document leading to *Raise the Bar* (p. 79). An important call to action by Apple (2019) urges that "we have an ethical obligation to make public the effects of these policies, to challenge these positions, and to defend a robust education that is based on human flourishing" (p. 277). It is imperative absent presences be pursued to uncover what may be less obvious or forthright.

Giroux (2015) unapologetically stresses neoliberalism as "the latest stage of predatory capitalism" (as stated in Rodd & Sanders 2018, p. 36). Neoliberalism is strategically cast in a light to appear inclusive while primarily benefitting middle and upper classes. Empirical evidence corroborates such attributions to neoliberalism. In Australia, a study by Connell (2011) found a strong correlation between educational attainment and socio-economic (dis)advantage, meaning that a deeply classed society was reflected in public education. Similar outcomes in Nova Scotia, especially in the most urban region, receive criticism. As Corfu (2018) revealed, funding to schools does not consider residential formations representing deeply classed areas. If inclusive education is truly the pinnacle of what Nova Scotian education strives to provide, multiple shifts are required to meaningfully respect a myriad of genders, socioeconomic classes, 'races', languages, and much more. Above all, what is crucial, is not just the written commitment. The implementation of inclusive school policies will concretely uncover to what extent assurances are held onto, as critical policy elucidates.

The key recommendations by the two of the most recent educational reviews, *Status Quo* (2014) and *Raise the Bar* (2018), mirror current rhetoric of the importance of school and the economy, as demonstrated by newly elected Premier Houston, and in EECD's publication in September 2021 as part of the *Accountability Report 2020-21: Education and Early Childhood Development* (Education and Early Childhood Development, 2021b). Applying the logic from Corbett (2008) to the approach in Glaze's report *Raise the Bar* ascertains the overarching spectrum that begins and ends with a "macro" view (p. 360). Using the analogy of an aerial photograph, which can provide a picture of everything at once at that moment in time, Corbett (2008) would frame Glaze's report as a purview of education to a degree where sweeping changes are provided (p. 360). Given it used performance data as the only other research outside of her own (swift) research, *Raise the Bar* professed its authority by not calling for further research to dis/prove the results. In fact, in considering decision making, Galway & Sheppard (2015) succinctly posit that the inherent problem is that it "is overly dependent on informal, populist and experiential knowledge is that it is haphazard and fundamentally reactive, thereby inviting continuous reform and readjustment" (p. 30). Without democratic processes that are more involved in the decision-making process, education reforms risk continuing the current trend of being out of touch.

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