

## 7 The ever-present discourses in education: Discourse and educational change

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### Introduction

Education and schooling are at the heart of society with most developed societies channelling, selecting and imparting ways of knowing, learning and understanding through the established institution of the school. How we make sense of what education means, and is for, is deeply bound to how we talk about education and how these ways convey meaning and value in society. These meanings and relevance which education and schooling maintain tend to change over time, influenced by various political, cultural and societal changes. Throughout this chapter, education is explored as characterised by historical discourses which have shaped and changed the way in which education is thought about, and how the purposes of schooling are defined. Education is, therefore, presented and analysed through various discursive formations which are discussed chronologically and linked to the notion of discourse.

The notion of discourse is used as a critically exploratory tool which helps us think about education and what happens in school more critically, and not just as a result of emerging educational policy. Firstly, the chapter will define the notion of discourse in order to set the scene for the theoretical points discussed. Discourses are presented as important norms in which society thinks about its core dynamics; education is a very important dynamic in society, but discourse creates its social meaning and purpose. Secondly, there are critical reflections on one of the common discourses which contributed to the beginnings of education and schooling, the deserving poor. This is a common discourse which revolves around education, perhaps more significantly during the rise of mass education in England which coincides with the Industrial Revolution. This discourse is explored historically, and unravelled with a focus on how its effects shaped the purpose of education. Thirdly, the chapter critically explores discourses around education as serving the needs of the economy, from both a historical perspective and as influenced by key political interventions.

The chapter offers a historical analysis of common discourses in education and revisits important developments in education and schooling. The sections will introduce the reader to important historical developments which have created the system of education and schooling as we know it. Education is a complex process which has become ubiquitous in everyday life, and we rarely ask critical questions about it. Thus, the chapter is an opportunity to examine and discuss why our current systems of schooling and education function in the way they do, utilising the notion of discourse as a critical backdrop to isolate some of the effects behind educational change.

### Understanding discourse

The French theorist Michel Foucault speaks of discourse as the ways in which a society creates and divides meaning about any object: ‘discourse is not simply that which manifests or hides’ the object of which we speak, it is also the object itself; ‘history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is power which is to be seized’ (Foucault, 1987: 52–53). This initial definition points to how Foucault thought about discourse and how he focused on how discourse works, rather than what

discourse is. For Foucault, discourse is much more than language or narrative, it is more than words and what can be said about something; it is rather more about how those possible statements create and maintain meaning and purpose. Foucault also argues that discourse normally works through, and becomes organised through, institutions in society such as hospitals, the courts and, of course, schools. Discourse allows and disallows the possible meanings and representations of something in society, and societies administer dominant meanings and representations through selected institutions. For instance, think about how the world of law is transacted in courts of law, and similarly how the world of education is transacted in schools. Thus, schooling is an important institution for any society; it is how societies decide to disseminate knowledge, culture and attitudes that society considers of value at a particular time. However, the ways in which as a society we have constructed an understanding of what education is, or is for, changes through time; changes can be explained by using the notion of discourse.

Although discourse is a very tricky notion to define, it is important to lay some basic definitions which give an insight of what discourse is. Hall speaks of discourse as:

a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed.

(Hall, 1992: 201)

Therefore, discourse does not refer to one particular statement, but rather to various, or a series of, statements which give shape to a discursive formation, resulting from the statements. The discursive formation is the intelligible way in which we can talk about a particular theme or topic at any given point in society. Within education and schooling, this chapter argues that there have been many discursive formations which have allowed ways in which education has become intelligible or understood, and which have defined its meaning and purposes. Yet, this does not mean that education can only be what the discursive formation dictates, as there is no truth about education. It is suggested rather that the meanings we know about education are the result of a series of competing discursive formations which tend to change historically, and depending on which historical point we refer to, we encounter dominant discursive formations.

The following sections pursue a historical analysis of education through the notion of discourse, following the understandings previously laid out. If discourse is said to ‘govern the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about’ (Hall, 1992: 44), then what could be some of the dominant discourses that have underpinned the development of education in the UK? Also, how have these discursive formations influenced the perceived purposes of education?

### **Mass education and the deserving poor**

Movement towards a system of mass education began with the rise of the Industrial Revolution in England. The Industrial Revolution provoked social, cultural and economic change; one very important change was the movement of people from the countryside and rural areas to places which became big industrial cities with constantly rising populations. The construction of factories was made possible with the invention of the steam engine and the opening and establishment of railway routes across the country, connecting cities, facilitated the expansion of industry and new communities (Lawson and Silver, 2007). Once factories began operating, they offered more lucrative and diverse types of work which people saw as new opportunities.

The Industrial Revolution is inextricably linked to the rise of mass education because the rapidly expanding cities produced an urban culture marked by rising mortality rates, disease, overcrowded housing and very poor living conditions. Amongst these emerging social problems child labour, child exploitation and child crime were an everyday occurrence, and it was very difficult to address these problems as the new towns and cities were expanding without any meaningful local monitoring or planning. There was a recognition that urban living conditions were very poor; for instance, regular outbreaks of cholera led to the passing of the 1848 Public Health Act, an attempt to understand and mitigate some of the more pressing public health issues facing the populations in cities. (See also Chapter 11.)

The condition in which children lived did not go unnoticed, and whilst the Church of England was the main provider of schooling at this time, they were by no means able to educate most children in society. Education in church schools was a privilege that few could access and the majority of children could actually be found working in factories in dangerous conditions alongside their families, or sometimes on their own. It is perhaps not surprising that one of the earliest government interventions to introduce the idea of education as part of a child's life was the 1833 Factory Act. The Act was introduced as an attempt to reduce child labour; it introduced a minimum of 2 hours daily for schooling and instruction, banned children younger than 9 from working in factories, prohibited children working at night and reduced the working hours to a maximum of 9 for 9 to 13 year-olds and 12 hours for 13 to 18-year-olds (Lawson and Silver, 2007). However, this Act did not eradicate child cruelty and child labour, nor did it offer a systematic educational vision for children; factory owners determined what the instruction should be.

Discourses around poor children at this time construct a need for change in society which began with notions of charity. The notion of charity has been underpinned by the Christian faith; charity is seen as a Christian practice as it involves supporting those in need, but implicitly leads to ideas of those who are to be helped. Considerable amounts of social change have been achieved by appealing to charity and the discursive formation of 'the deserving poor', who are to benefit from charitable donations and work, 'convincing the powerful of the moral good' behind every act of charity (Choules, 2007: 466). The deserving poor are those groups of people in society whom we regard as deserving of public expense and charity since they are not in control or to blame for the conditions in which they live. The deserving poor as a discursive formation shapes the subjects of discourse, in this case, the children during the industrial revolution, as being 'at risk', 'needing protection', 'lacking in morality and in education'. In present times there are still such discourses which help us identify ourselves with certain parts of the deserving poor discourse. A key example in the UK is Comic Relief, which is organised every other year to help charitable projects and initiatives in poor parts of the world, reaching as far as parts of Africa and South East Asia and raising millions of pounds. By collecting and giving money we are positioning ourselves as the powerful and the charitable in the discourse of the deserving poor, whilst those in receipt of the help, besides being helped, are made into the perfect image of the deserving poor, who should in gratitude accept help in any form it might come. Children and the conditions in which they lived in industrial times appealed to society's sense of charity and moral good, and these are ideas deeply bound within systems of education that followed. Yet they were also paternalistic and patronising in what type of education the poor really needed. (See also Chapter 3.)

The notion of schooling and education that forms as a result of the discourse of the deserving poor is characterised by satisfying the needs of the industrial masters and the factory owners, since the poorer sections of society were not seen as being able to benefit from a liberal education (Lawson and Silver, 2007). Instead, the poor needed simple and religious instruction, based around reading, writing, arithmetic and religion, knowledge which could help them participate in industrialised labour and shape

their obedience and moral character. The discourse of the deserving poor is important since it is one of the earliest discourses in the foundations of education and schooling, and one which has contributed to the emergence of schools, but also limited the scope of the education received by people. The discourse of the deserving poor also constructed poor people as only being able to benefit from an education which could instill basic skills, religious observance and a good work ethic. Gone from this discourse are critical thinking skills, the needs of the individual and the nourishing of talents that individuals have.

As a discourse in education, the deserving poor can be seen as the imposition of the needs of society over the needs of the individual. Whilst the establishing of schools had a very big impact on children's lives and living conditions, creating an environment where children were educated, safer and better fed, the level of education they had access to came with distinct limitations and classed expectations. To this effect, Marxist social theorist Louis Althusser (1993) argues in *Essays on Ideology* that schooling's primary purpose is to reproduce the principles of capitalism by training a workforce in more than knowledge, but also training them to learn and accept their place in unequal societies. Althusser explains:

What do children learn at school?... they learn to read, to write and to add... which are directly useful in the different jobs in production... But besides these techniques and knowledges... children also learn the rules of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is destined for... rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect... for the order established by class domination... the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also at the same time the reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order.

(Althusser, 1993: 6)

Following this critique of education, the discourse of the deserving poor has created a system of education which is associated with the need of subservient workers who will respect the rules, codes of conduct and behaviour necessary for accessing the labour market. Yet, at the same time, workers work for a wage, and accept their lower position in a capitalist system which is offering greater benefits to those who can create and own systems of production. This creates problematising inequalities since it is more difficult for individuals to be creative and critical if they are educated in systems which are already shaped to satisfy the needs of society.

Education and schooling have historically been influenced by class and privilege, with stark differences in the job outcomes of those who are educated in state schools and those who are educated in fee-paying private or public schools. Francis and Wong (2013) argue that the differential in employment outcomes in England and Wales corroborates how the type of school attended has a huge effect on who secures the top jobs in the country. In their research they claim that over 70 per cent of top jobs in the country are secured by people who attended public and independent schools, when only seven per cent of the population attend these types of schools (Francis and Wong, 2013). The education of the deserving poor was in contrast with the education of those who could afford to pay for a more classical education or attend university. The aim of popular education was to create a workforce, whilst the more classical and privileged forms of education aimed to produce leaders. Lawson and Silver (2007: 231) explain how education from its inception was a matter of class, with the poor to be educated to 'work intelligibly and the middle class to govern intelligibly'.

Systems of education and schooling were further influenced by the Forster Act of 1870, the Further Education Act of 1880, and the Butler Act of 1944. These education Acts mark formal government involvement and allocation of public funds towards a system of schooling for England and Wales. Whilst government involvement meant that a significant portion of public funds were to be committed to educating the masses and paying for schools and teachers, it also meant that the education received by the majority of children was primarily to develop basic skills. Education is said to be one of the main ways in which a country enables equality of opportunity and social mobility between different social classes. However, since its inception education has created divisive class differences diminishing its potential (Bathmaker et al., 2016).

The discourse of the deserving poor in education has left a historical trail highlighting the division between the poor and the wealthy. Vast differences still remain. Although education offered access to a better life for many children, bringing important issues to the foreground, such as, child poverty, child mortality and child exploitation, it has not succeeded in improving overall equalities in society. Social mobility is still a significant issue in England and Wales, with stifling trends in recent years, and a system of education which addresses important social problems, but which does not open up enough opportunities for all (Francis and Wong, 2013; Gristy et al., 2019).

### **Education and the needs of the economy**

Examining educational change through political rhetoric and political discourse is a very important way in which we come to understand education (Bustillos Morales and Abegglen, 2018). How we come to know education, both in its nature and in its purpose, is largely influenced by government interventions in schools and in the production of educational policy. Based on Foucault's (1987) understanding of discourse, this chapter suggests that the knowledge we hold on education is permeated by the very discourses that allow us to speak of it in particular ways. One of the ways in which discourse functions is through the 'will to knowledge' (Foucault, 1987). Schools as social institutions carry a responsibility to will (us) to knowledge. For example, schools will (us) to knowledge Mathematics in a particular way, will (us) to knowledge History in a particular way, will (us) to knowledge Literature in a particular way and through particular literary works. Yet, who wills us to know education? What education is and what it should be for? In this section I discuss how political discourses on education will us to know education in specific ways, influencing how we define a worthwhile or valuable education. Foucault (1987: 48) states that the will to knowledge:

... comprises a discrete realm of discursive practices ... a conceptual terrain in which knowledge is formed and produced ... Discursive practices are characterised by a delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories.

So, which are some important historical points in UK politics which have willed the general public to know education? Arguably, all governments produce a set of discourses on education. However, the changes which began during the 1970s and continued in the next two decades are very significant since they have deeply influenced how we perceive education and schooling and the value they bring to society. An important recurrent rhetoric of this time is that of education needing to satisfy the needs of the economy, taking education beyond its social and cultural values and contribution. Let us explore how education and schooling became so closely tied to the changing economic imperatives of our time.

Discourses around education began to be closely tied with the economy and the needs of industry with James Callaghan's speech delivered at Ruskin College, Oxford on 18th October 1976.

The speech initiated a great debate in public which called into question the purposes of education, and it paved the way for later reforms in education and schooling. Education and schooling in the 1970s were characterised by a loose curriculum, informal teaching methods and very little government intervention. Before Callaghan, Prime Ministers were simply not interested in what went on in schools, but with the Callaghan speech a new set of discursive formations took shape around education, those which equated education with satisfying employers' needs, disguised in a discourse pointing to the need to raise standards. Very importantly, the Callaghan speech marked the beginning of significant changes to the educational system which were introduced during the later governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. Callaghan set out some of these ideas in his speech by stating:

I have been concerned to find out that many of our best trained students who have completed the higher levels of education at university or polytechnic have no desire to join industry. Their preferences are to stay in academic life or to find their way into the civil service. There seems to be a need for more technological bias in science teaching that will lead towards practical applications in industry rather than towards academic studies.

(Callaghan cited in Jarvis and Griffin, 2003: 146)

Following an analysis through discourse allows for understanding how the statements that are made about education create a possible set of meanings which become the discursive reality around education (what it seems possible to say about education). With the Callaghan speech and statements as the ones above, the world of education and schooling became re-interpreted as needing to serve the interests of employers, particularly with an emphasis on technology and the natural sciences. In the case of education, the vision and discursive formations – the statements used to describe what the key purpose of education should be – outlined in the Callaghan speech opened the inner workings of the school to government intervention and monitoring.

Although James Callaghan did not pursue the changes he had proposed for education himself, his speech laid the foundations for significant educational change. The Conservative governments which succeeded Callaghan's focused on opening schools to Hayekian free-market economics which emphasised competition, normally between schools, and choice for parents and students, who were seen as consumers. The changes to education in the decades between 1979 and 1997 centered on the 'weakening and dismantling of local educational authority (LEA) and teacher autonomy ... an uneasy combination of centralisation and devolution' (Ball, 2017: 14). The centralisation of power which had resided in local education authorities to run and fund local schools seemed to be coming apart. Instead, schools were granted options to become independent from local authority control and to devise and pursue other ways of funding themselves. The government project during this time aimed to address the perceived inefficiency of the welfare and public service models, with privatisation and independence from public funding highly encouraged. The emerging discourses around education at the time were linked to the Conservative government's distrust of the public sector's autonomy. Education was talked about as needing change and reform, to make teachers and schools accountable and responsible for their own image and success, and that of their students. The changes to come would primarily affect mainstream schooling, that is state schools, not private schools or the old public schools which have historically been exempt from changes brought by government educational policy.

One significant change occurring after the Callaghan speech was the introduction of a prescriptive National Curriculum in 1988. Before this time there was no statutory government control over what was taught in schools. The origins of the Education Act of 1988 are an inevitable consequence of the Callaghan speech which highlighted the importance of 'school autonomy, the response to the economic crisis of 1970s, and the increasing link being made between education and economic needs'

(Wyse and Torrance, 2009: 215). The National Curriculum introduced in England and Wales transformed the everyday lives of pupils and teachers. The National Curriculum affected the organisation, the principles and the very knowledge it imposed on teachers and pupils, reproducing ways in which education could be talked about and thought about, and these reflected ‘economically rooted norms’ (Apple, 2013: 19). Some of these norms point to the need for standardisation and utility of knowledge and subjects, creating a set of useful facts that have value in society. Also was the idea of a standardised pedagogy in which these facts and knowledge should be presented to students, undermining the expertise of teachers. Lastly, the expectation that these facts and knowledge can be learnt by all pupils within a particular timeline, which can also be monitored and tested through standardised assessment to measure educational outcomes for all pupils. The pragmatic changes brought by the introduction of the national curriculum changed what schools viewed as valuable knowledge. The need for standardisation was closely linked to the government’s economic-based discourse around education and schooling. Behind curricular change the most distinctive expectation was that teaching and learning in all schools should reflect the needs of the economy, as interpreted by the government of the time. What an education entails then becomes only intelligible through the economic value it brings to the individual and to society. Learning just for the sake of learning becomes a radical discourse in education, since the prevalent and dominant discourses, dictated by political rhetoric, point to securing a job in industry as the primary goal the education system should deliver.

Callaghan’s speech can be seen to underscore other discourses which brought more significant change to education. In the 1990s, Prime Minister Tony Blair spoke of education as ‘the best economic policy’; he highlighted how education was at the heart of ‘economic policy making for the future’ by claiming, ‘this country will succeed or fail on the basis of how it changes itself, and gears up to this new economy, based on knowledge’ (Blair cited in Ball, 2017: 14). Having seen schools and education opened to competition and choice in the 1980s and 1990s, the New Labour government led by Blair focused on ‘the role of education as a producer of labour ... and of subjectivities, values and sensibilities like enterprise and entrepreneurship’ (Ball, 2017: 13). Leading educational change was the idea of responding to economic necessity, responding to the global economy, competing in global markets and helping individuals to take their place in what is referred to as ‘the knowledge economy’. This new economy characterised by creativity and high skills is ‘an economy that has shifted from one in which physical resources, human and material, are the main inputs to production, to one, in which the most significant and financially valuable activities are knowledge-based or “symbolic”’ (Temple, 2013: 1). This economic model thrives on professionalism and knowing individuals who act like experts and entrepreneurs, not just securing a job in the knowledge economy, but also helping to create more jobs. The educational discourses resulting from this era saw education as a business, providing a service, serving consumers who wanted a particular product, a ‘good’ education, judged ‘good’ largely on competitive test results.

New Labour continued discourses around education as ‘needing improvement’, in order to serve economic purposes, but it also enabled the participation of ‘new providers outside the public sector in the delivery of education services when public sector organisations were deemed to be failing or underperforming ... what is known as outsourcing’ (Ball, 2017: 15). Both Conservative and New Labour governments produced educational changes which created a derisive discourse around education in the public sector. Schools and teaching in general were continuously constructed as ‘lacking’ and ‘needing reform’, school standards were created ‘in relation to institutional and international competitiveness’, and not the school community and its specific needs (Ball, 2013: 82). These historical changes have willed us to know the institution of the school as harnessed to competitive markets, career pathways and the skills needed in a knowledge economy, very often overlooking the individuality of students and the immediate needs of school communities.

Simon, C. A., & Downes, G. (Eds.). (2020). *Sociology for education studies: Connecting theory, settings and everyday experiences*. Taylor & Francis Group.

The discourses around education initiated by New Labour sought to change education by forming what Jones (2003: 160) describes as ‘new alliances’, seeking privatisation in education which were central to New Labour’s project of transformation, leaving ‘no place in this new system for the forces associated with earlier periods of reform’. The old forces from early periods are those of the local education authorities and the autonomy of teachers in schools; these were seen as preventing innovation in education and schools. Equating the purpose of education to serve the needs of industry has also had other effects which are seldom discussed, such as the undermining of teachers’ and education professionals’ expertise, and the notion that education is subservient to economic needs.

More recently, discourses around education have been further opened to the private sector with the introduction of the Academies system in England and Wales. In the early 2000s, the Labour government introduced the Academies programme which was continued and expanded under the Coalition government in 2010. Academy Trusts were given funding to help state schools deemed as ‘failing’ or ‘requiring improvement’ by Ofsted inspections; state-schools were to become Academies and be managed by Academy Trusts. Many of these Academies are not just sponsored by the government, but by businesses and companies, under charitable status (Hatcher, 2006). The significantly diminished role of LEA and the increase in sponsorships of schools turn Academies into a unique system which is spreading the privatisation of education, but is also turning schools into an opportunity to influence politics (West and Bailey, 2013). The changes Academies have allowed include private individuals and companies to become sponsors of schools, a way in which governments have sought to pay for education through alternative funding, and not just through taxation. Whilst sponsoring might be a way to give back to communities, sponsoring schools may also be a means of winning influence with government. This is illustrated by Hatcher (2006: 612) who says that the former UK head of Enron, listed by the Specialist Schools Trust as a specialist school donor, said that ‘sponsorship and donations were the best way of getting access to ministers’. The discourse of education as serving the economy and the needs of employers has redefined the role of the state in the provision of education, allowing the state to retrieve its responsibilities.

There are important points to reflect upon when we think about how education and the world of the schools have become so inextricably linked with economic growth and competitiveness. In a world where globalisation and the knowledge economy have been said to be crashing (Pagano and Rossi, 2009) under the new Protectionism of US politics, and unprecedented political events such as the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union, known as Brexit, what is the new purpose of education? If we have tied our schools’ futures so tightly to the fate of the economy, how can we respond in times of such economic and social upheaval? Perhaps the answer to these questions might be found by considering the discourses which have been pushed aside because of the prevalence of the education-for-the-economy discourse. Thinking about the accepted and desired discourses around education inevitably leads us to reflect upon those other discourses which have become derided and undesirable. Learning just for the sake of learning, individuals pursuing their interests, education as more than securing employment are some of these discourses which are seen as increasingly deviant.

This theorisation of discourse through the will to knowledge allows us to reflect on how the knowledge produced around the nature and purposes of education has changed. The chapter presents the view that there has been a harnessing of education to competitive markets, career pathways and skills needed in a knowledge economy.



## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed educational developments from a critical historical perspective which isolates some of the societal and political discourses we find in education. Throughout the discussion many key historical points have been identified as changing discourses around education. Some of these were the deserving poor and the rise of mass schooling, the Callaghan speech and education as coopted by the needs of the economy. Whilst the historical points are illustrative of how education has been changed by political interventions, the notion of discourse helps us to be more critical as to how we have produced accepted ideas regarding the purposes of education. The notion of discourse, then, is a conceptual catalyst with which we can think more critically about the world of education and its ever-changing nature and climate.

Some of the key perspectives developed point to how the discourse of the deserving poor has generated deep-rooted inequalities and divisions in education as a social dynamic. Importantly, the chapter considered how the discourse of the deserving poor has been part of education from its very early beginnings, producing education as a response to society's social problems and inequalities. This is followed by reflections on how political discourse has constructed education as directly tied to economic prosperity and growth. The pairing of education with economic imperatives has established itself, undermining the expertise of teachers and the very specific needs of students and school communities. The importance of political discourse in education is explored with reference to changes occurring during the Thatcherite era, New Labour and more recently, the Coalition and Conservative governments.

Education is not short of changes and interventions, some of which are discussed in this chapter. However, the underlying discourses produced by these changes always remain undetectable or complicit because of their mandatory nature. For instance, the chapter discussed how the introduction of the national curriculum changed the world of schooling, but also how it creates a set of discourses around education, teaching and learning which give education a whole new purpose. It is very easy just to accept these changes as ways in which we have changed our educational systems to be more progressive, or standardised, and these rules have to be followed as they are educational policy. Yet, it is similarly very important to ask critical questions around what these changes do to the endeavour of educating and schooling a population, how they change and fix the discourses around education.

Thinking about the developments that have created the systems of education that we currently know and experience requires us to become more sensitive to how we define the meaning and purpose of education. In this chapter, an exploration around societal and political discourses has presented a few problematic consequences of harnessing education closely with economic demands. In the process of change that education has undergone in the last 30 years, education has been slowly unravelled from the public services sector, incentivising schools to become independent from local control and convert to academies if they want their funding to increase. What is more, education itself is becoming a business opportunity and more aligned with the demands of employers and industry, with big businesses becoming involved in the sponsoring and the running of schools.

As a result of these changes, the chapter has suggested that education continues to be an amalgam of forces and discourses which change historically, either gaining or losing momentum because of changes to educational policy and pressures from different governments. In this current climate, educators and teachers are constructed as subjects of policy, their role understood as implementers of policy and governmental expectations, rather than individuals with expertise and a vocation for teaching and learning. Schools are having to exist within a competitive educational environment where results impact significantly on funding and resources. Consequently, the meaning

and the purpose of education is coopted by discourses of competition, selection and accountability which undermine other possible discourses.

### Summary

- The development of education is complex and it can be explained by examining historical, political and social imperatives of the time.
- Discourse as a notion can be used to generate a more detailed analysis of how we perceive education in society. Going beyond the normalised acceptance, we have of changes in policy. Discourse produces a deeper and more critical set of questions around educational change.
- Isolating some of the historical and political discourses around education allows us to see how education has been changed to serve the purposes of dominant discourses, such as, the privileging of economic imperatives over schools' or individuals' needs.
- If education is to change and contest some of the prevalent discourses, there needs to be wide critical engagement with how the dominant discourses in education reduce the importance of teaching and learning, student voice and teacher expertise.

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