Investigating the Experiences of Faculty Members and Administrators with Quality Assurance and Accountability in Higher Education in Ontario

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Abstract

The main objective of this qualitative case study was to explore the professional experience of six faculty members and three administrators in higher education during a time of increasing quality assurance and accountability policies so to gain a deeper understanding of how neoliberalism is changing their work experience as academics in Ontario, Canada. I have presented the research findings by employing policy sociology as both theory and methodology using the method of the qualitative case study. This form of qualitative inquiry provided an opportunity to explore how each interviewee navigated the current context of neoliberalism within their respective roles in the university.

The findings from this study revealed that a critical analysis of policies regarding quality assurance and accountability in higher education must begin to take into consideration an account of the local and personal professional context that at present are eclipsed by neoliberal accountability discourses regarding what is valued as quality in higher education. The interviewees presented expressed work experiences based on performativity that is driven by datafication and its consequences that are voiced by each of the participants. This case study documented, analyzed, and critically engaged with how policies of quality assurance and accountability have created an increased sense of surveillance and performativity. The findings also suggest how the rise of datafication in the work of faculty members and administrators has placed higher education in Ontario, Canada on the slippery slope of performance based funding that has become increasingly standardized due to neoliberalism.

This dissertation critiques standardized neoliberal policies regarding what counts as quality assurance and accountability in higher education. Thus, this study holds significant implications for government and university quality assurance and accountability policies that promote performance based assessments and funding such as the recent Strategic Mandate Agreement in Ontario, Canada.

Key Words: Higher education; quality assurance; accountability; neoliberalism; faculty members; administrators; performance based funding; Ontario; Canada
Summary for Lay Audience

This research investigated the experiences of faculty members and administrators with quality assurance and accountability in higher education in Ontario, Canada informed by neoliberalism. Neoliberalism for the purpose of this study is broadly defined as the economization and marketization of all human endeavours. Higher education for the purpose of this dissertation refers to the university. The main theoretical and methodological concept used for this study is that of policy sociology. Policy sociology as both theory and methodology is useful for this study as it moves beyond quantifying the experience of educators to take into consideration the importance of how history, politics, and economics each have come to shape educational policy and the experiences of educators, all the while paying attention to the importance of context.

The findings of this dissertation suggest that policies for quality assurance and accountability have come to shape the work experience of those who participated in this case study, through an increased use of data by government and universities in Ontario, Canada. This data includes, but is not limited to: teaching evaluations provided annually by students, recorded number of citations, number of scholarly peer-reviewed articles published, and number of large-scale grants achieved. The findings from this research also revealed that the use of data in determining quality assurance and accountability has led to experiences of work intensification, feelings of surveillance, and performativity, which takes teaching in the university from being a performative act to evaluations based on performance.

Finally, this study examined the Strategic Mandate Agreement in Ontario, Canada that places higher education (college and university) firmly on the neoliberal path of performance based funding. Performance based funding, which is based, but not limited to, access to higher education, retention of number of students who start and finish their program, number of students that graduate, and number of students who gain employment in their field of study six months after graduation and two-years after graduation. My findings provide a critique of neoliberal policies such as the Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) arguing that the SMA will lead to a narrower understanding and experience of quality assurance and accountability in higher education that has implications for equity, diversity, inclusion and the purpose of the university.

This research study is intended to help us understand how the experiences of faculty members and administrators in higher education in Ontario, Canada are being shaped through quality assurance and accountability policies framed through market understandings and the consequences this holds regarding the work of faculty members, administrators, and the purpose of higher education.
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Chapter 1:

Introduction

This research investigated the professional experiences of faculty members and administrators in higher education during an era of increasing accountability and quality assurance policies in Ontario, Canada. Globally, many nations have now developed and implemented methods of quality assurance to measure and indicate if their universities are productive in regard to student learning outcomes and the research generated by such institutions (Whitehead, 2011). Thus, with renewed neoliberal interest in higher education, governments are seeking policy advice from international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The purpose of this advice is to assess and provide insight on standards for quality assurance in higher education believing that such organizations afford a high-level of expertise, legitimacy, and non-partisanship in education (Morgan and Shahjahan, 2014).

The central purpose for quality assurance in higher education, worldwide, has evolved from concerns regarding structural resources to its present understanding based on outcomes, which are defined as student employability upon degree completion and the commodification of research (OECD, 2012; Ozga, 2008). As universities reshape and remodel themselves increasingly to reflect the corporate structure, they have adopted the business model; one that places value on evidence-based research by numbers (Lingard and Sellar, 2013). However, as policy by numbers places increasing emphasis on accountability, performativity and metrics based on outcomes it does so through a “way
of making it more difficult to act and think as usual and of rethinking our relationship to ourselves and to others, and our possibilities of existence” (Ball, 2013, p. 144).

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided this investigation:

1) What role does neoliberalism play in what ‘counts’ as quality in higher education?

2) How do faculty members and administrators experience quality assurance policies?

3) How do quality assurance policies, framed through a neoliberal rationality, affect how faculty members and administrators understand themselves in the university?

Rationale

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Quality assurance policy in higher education is a global phenomenon. As such defining quality assurance policy proves complex, as it is both technical and political, it holds different meaning for different stakeholders, and it is contextual (Ball et al., 2012).

Quality assurance in higher education is challenging as it has taken on new meaning due to the rapid expansion of higher education over the past four decades, which has transformed the university from being vessels of learning to vessels for economic development. This transformation is argued to have changed the “social position and economic importance of higher education” (Randall, 2008, p.1). As a result of this growth in higher education and its increasing cost to both government and the individual, a significant amount of research by international organizations, such as the OECD, has gone into exploring quality assurance methods (Morgan and Shahjahan, 2014).

Although a growing body of research on higher education reforms, policy development, and implementation exists, there has been limited empirical research
regarding the experience of faculty members and administrators in higher education. Thus, drawing primarily from the theoretical framework of policy sociology (Ozga, 1987; 2019; Ball, 1994; 2012), this research explored and examined the experiences of faculty members and administrators vis-à-vis their position in the context of the increasing neoliberal rationality of quality assurance policies that are introduced by international organizations and implemented by government.

Quality Assurance and accountability in higher education is not only a Canadian consideration. External quality assurance protocols are widely used in higher education by most nations, including Canada, and increasingly so over the course of the past four decades. While most agree with the importance of quality assurance in education and higher education, its present widespread use has become synonymous with top-down methods for accountability and is posited to be an important part of the economic development of higher education and the internationalization of higher education (Lingard et al., 2016; TEQSA, 2012b; HEQCO, 2010). Thus, considerable research continues regarding how ‘quality’ should be defined, how quality is to be achieved and what measures to use that could best demonstrate ‘quality’ within the context of higher education (Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (Quality Council (QC), 2010; ENQA, 2005; HEQCO, 2010, HEQCO, 2015).

With greater emphasis on the internationalization and economic development of higher education many nations now have in place organizations to externally assess and advise on standards for quality assurance in higher education believing that such organizations afford a degree of non-partisanship when researching and providing such recommendations for policy reforms to government and universities alike (HEQCO,
2010). Adding to the economization of the university, an increasing area of higher education research has been on demonstrating quality through degree outcomes, often defined as graduation rates and employment upon graduation (Skolnik, 2010).

The European University Association (EUA), in association with the Bologna Process (BP), commissioned the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) to create a report on quality assurance, which was presented in 2005, suggesting,

[I]f Europe is to achieve its aspiration to be the most dynamic and knowledge based economy in the world (Lisbon Strategy), then European higher education will need to demonstrate that it takes the quality of its programmes and awards seriously and is willing to put into place the means of assuring and demonstrating that quality (2005, p.10).

Further to this, the report states that the “[European Higher Education Association] EHEA with its then 40 states is characterized by its diversity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, aspirations and expectations. This makes a single monolithic approach to higher education inappropriate” (ENQA, 2005, p.11). These concerns become exceptionally relevant to a diverse nation such as Canada where there exists no clearly defined national ministry for higher education or a national framework for quality assurance and accountability in higher education.

It is specifically to the discourse on the ‘quality’ of higher education that Weingarten and Deller (2010) argue that for Ontario to improve its level of quality in higher education policies regarding differentiation between universities must be implemented. Weingarten and Deller (2010) position is that universities themselves
should be held fiscally accountable for that level of quality as demonstrated through the commodification of research and the employability of its graduates. Thus, Weingarten and Deller (2010) suggest that the university should not view the idea of differentiation as constraining. Rather, the two authors posit that differentiation ought to be viewed as a method which “promotes institutional quality and system competitiveness” among other characteristics such as “accountability” and “sustainability” (Weingarten and Deller, 2010, p.10). However, this approach to quality through diversity between institutions is not the understanding put forth by the EHEA’s position on institutional diversity, which, as noted above is “characterized by its diversity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, aspirations and expectations (ENQA, 2005, p.11).

In a publication by University Affairs (2017) a discussion takes place that questions the challenges of institutional diversity in higher education when teaching and research become separated activities from each other and the implications of this form of diversification on the quality of learning in higher education (Riddell, 2017). Also, of importance to the discourse on quality and quality assurance in higher education is how it is defined. As noted earlier, a common understanding of quality assurance policy in higher education is complex. Weingarten speaks to this complexity in his blog It’s Not Academic when he shares with his readers the daunting task that fell before him when embarking as CEO and President at HEQCO,

I did what I was trained to do. I consulted presumed experts. I read volumes of material on the subject. I held long and probing discussions with my peers. For all my efforts, I got no clarity. There appeared to be no consensus on a definition of quality. More discouragingly, some argued that whatever quality was, it could not be measured. The general view was that quality referred
to some threshold, adequate or superior level of performance. But
there was no agreement on the dimensions of performance, how
performance could be measured, or what constituted threshold,
adequate or superior performance (and certainly no agreement on
what constituted “excellence” or “world class”). And, anyway, in
a world of differentiated postsecondary systems, it did not seem
reasonable that all institutions would have the same set of
performance measures, indicators or levels, even if these could be

A question then, how do we hold universities accountable if defining quality is truly this
complex?

Discussing the importance of quality assurance, the QC (2010) states that in
Ontario there is an established history of quality assurance in higher education; sharing
that in Ontario strict external methods of measuring the quality of undergraduate
programs in higher education can be traced back to 1968. The Ontario Council of
Graduate Studies (OCGS) began external assessments in 1982 of all graduate programs
(QC, 2010). Thus, it is suggested that Ontario could be viewed as an innovator with
regard to quality assurance in higher education (QC, 2010). Ontario, at present, has the
largest number of publicly funded universities compared with other provinces
(Universities Canada, 2015). Therefore, it is also suggested that higher education and
access to quality higher education matters to Ontario (Rae, 2005).

Yet, while higher education in Ontario and quality assurance policies have a
tradition in this province, it would appear that Ontario, for the moment, is still exploring
how quality assurance could be defined and how global methods such as the Bologna
Process (BP) and the piloted, yet now paused, OECD’s AHELO project might be adapted
within the Canadian higher education policy context (Lennon and Jonker, 2014; Council
of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2008a). In a report released by Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, the following is stated,

While the impact of the Bologna Process on the Canadian higher education landscape has been limited to date, it is quite likely to become the yardstick against which other higher education systems will be compared internationally. The issue of comparison benchmarks will only grow in importance with the internationalization of student recruitment and increased labour force mobility (2008a, p.7).

Therefore, one might question how emerging concepts of quality assurance, the “issue of comparison benchmarks” (CMEC, 2008a, p.7) as defined by the Bologna Process and the OECD, will unfold and whom they might privilege. As Apple (2016) suggests, “Dominant groups have actively engaged in a vast social/pedagogic process, one in which what counts as a good school, good knowledge, good teaching, a good student, and good learning are being radically transformed” (pp. 148-149). Or, as Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti, and Sellar (2016) suggest, “What is counted is what counts in schooling today and is central to how accountability is framed” (p. 1).

This trend in higher education can be witnessed worldwide and as Shanahan (2009) notes, “Economic principles of productivity, efficiency and competitiveness have become imperatives. And we have seen our accountability frameworks become infused with market discourse, market principles and market mechanisms” (p.3). This speaks directly to the common sense discourse on higher education policy making that has emerged over the past decades and is believed to be “a political response to the challenges and opportunities which arise from the decomposition of Fordism and the economic and extra economic tendencies of globalisation” (Jessop 2002, p.124 in Ball, Goodson, and
The significance of higher education and its purpose has shifted dramatically over the past four decades as access continues to grow and the importance of knowledge for economic development continues to shape the values of the university (Berg and Seeber, 2016; Brown, 2015; Brownlee, 2015; Giroux, 2014; Peters, 2007). Educational research, in the global North and South, engaging in critical studies of education increasingly conclude the cause of these dramatic changes to be that of the increasing authority of neoliberalism. In Canada, Shanahan (2009) reports, “we have seen provincial governments increasingly adopting market mechanisms in funding and resource allocation. Business and private sector criteria are employed to make education decisions” (p.3).

Thus, while neoliberalism, as a theoretical concept, will be elaborated more fully within my theoretical framework, it becomes important to share an understanding of neoliberalism as conceptualized within this research. The theoretical concept of neoliberalism is thought to be a contested one. Peck (2013) when writing of neoliberalism states,

Neoliberalism has always been an unloved, rascal concept, mainly deployed with pejorative intent, yet at the same time apparently increasingly promiscuous in application. For some, it is the spider at the centre of the hegemonic web that is worldwide market rule. For others, it is a bloated jumbo concept of little utility, or worse, a cover for crudely deterministic claims tantamount to conspiracy theorizing or closet structuralism (p. 133).
However, while neoliberalism as a concept possesses different meanings Stuart Hall (2011a) asserts it is “politically necessary” to name neoliberalism (p. 10). With this I agree, for while neoliberalism is context dependent there have emerged similar rules for engagement with neoliberalism, which keep the neoliberal project alive and transforming. Thus, the grounding rules of neoliberalism, regardless of geopolitical difference, Hall and O’Shea (2011) suggest, are that neoliberalism seeks to make commonsense “a more competitive, individualistic market-driven, entrepreneurial, profit-oriented outlook” (p. 11). Hall and O’Shea when asking “But what is common sense?” rhetorically answer, “It is a form of ‘everyday thinking’, which offers us frameworks of meaning with which to make sense of the world. It is a form of popular, easily available knowledge which, contains no complicated ideas, requires no sophisticated argument and does not depend on deep thought or wide reading” (2013, p. 8).

When trying to make ‘common sense’ of the economic recession of the 1990s in Canada former Governor of the Bank of Canada (1994-2001), Gordon Thiessen, in a speech to The Canadian Club of Toronto notes that the early1990s, globally, were a complex period marked by great uncertainty. In Canada, persistent inflation carried over from the 1970s and into the 1980s continued to affect employment and the housing market. Technological advances in communications accelerated by globalization, in particular, increased market competition. Adding to all of this would also be Mexico’s own financial crisis and what this would mean to the Canadian economy. Thus, here in Canada inflationary rates, coupled by the advancement of globalization and a host of other economic events is thought to have affected our national economy differently (Thiessen, 2001). As a result of this economic crisis governments, in the global North,
seeking to restore fiscal balance were to said to turn hastily to public expenditures that were deemed bloated and in need of trimming (Connell and Dados, 2014; Theissen, 2001); the same public expenditures introduced post World War II that supported the economic and egalitarian development of a Keynesian welfare state.

Yet, in these early years of economic change, when compared to the reforms taking place in higher education internationally, public higher education in Ontario, Canada in the early 1990s proved relatively steady. Jones (2004) in his study on higher education elaborates,

In contrast to many other jurisdictions, Ontario’s system-level higher education policy environment had been comparatively stable since the early 1970s. In the midst of an international trend to large-scale system reform, Ontario (and Canada for that matter) was often seen as an “exception” characterized by modest policy changes within a structure that had been in place for two decades (p. 40).

Thus, while the early 1990s witnessed “modest policy changes” (Jones, 2004, p. 40) in Ontario all of this would change in 1995 under the provincial leadership of the Mike Harris Progressive Conservatives (1995-2002) and the “Common Sense Revolution” when higher education in Ontario would experience the greatest and most austere cutbacks in public funding (Jones, 2004). It should also be noted that it was in the early 1990s, under the New Democratic government, that the first mediatization of university rankings in Canada would occur as demonstrated in the Canadian publication of *MacLean’s Magazine* (1991).

Universities in Ontario, now, placed in the position of decreasing government support turned to increasing student tuition at a rate not experienced before and philanthropic donations from wealthy alumni and private business- each creating conflict
with the ideal of ‘public’ higher education (Jones, 2004). The ranking of universities coupled with “this form of privatization, the shift in balance of support from public (government) to private (students and their families) sources became a key theme of Ontario higher education reforms during this period” (Jones, 2004, p. 44). Of importance though is the recognition that the greatest financial cutbacks in support of higher education came not at a time of economic recession but during a time of economic growth and immense corporate tax cutbacks within Ontario. The implications of this on access, quality, accountability and the neoliberalization of higher education would lead to the next political shift in higher education in the province.

In 2004, Ontario’s Liberal Premier, Dalton McGuinty (2003-2013), premised his time in leadership with the tag line: “Strong People; Strong Economy” stating that an exceptional system of quality higher education that creates legitimate advantages for individuals in this province was not only deemed necessary but would become essential for economic growth on the world stage (Rae, 2005). Thus, McGuinty appointed former provincial leader Bob Rae to become an advisor to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) and to the Premier himself on the state of higher education. Rae, commissioned to create a report, along with seven others, on higher education in Ontario provided insight for what became considered a priority for the province, which was to transform higher education thereby making it more accessible, improving its standards of quality, system design, funding and accountability (Rae, 2005, p. 2).

In 2005, Rae’s report on higher education, *Ontario A Leader in Learning Report & Recommendations*, was published. In that same year, based on recommendations in this report, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) would be created
through the Higher Education Quality Council Act (2005). In 2006 HEQCO would become fully operational as a ‘neutral’ acting think tank for both the province and the MTCU. HEQCO’s mandate is to provide research and insights on higher education within the Province of Ontario that promote methods for advancing accessibility, quality, accountability and system design that was argued to be lacking within the context of higher education (Rae, 2005; Whitehead, 2011). Thus, while Quality Assurance has a tradition in Ontario, Professor Lee Harvey in a report for CMEC (2008) touches on the policy shift occurring in Canada as it relates to the changing focus for quality assurance suggesting that, “What does emerge from an outsider perspective on the situation in Canada, is something of a renaissance, in higher education policy. At the forefront, as Kirby (2007) characterizes it, is a shift from humanist to economic-utilitarian objectives in higher education” (p. 1).

OECD Deputy Secretary General, Aart de Geus (2002-2017) commenting on changes to higher education suggests that higher education has “grown from the reserve of a privileged few to a significant driver of economic growth” (CMEC, 2008b). These changes have translated into global competition in higher education, framed by neoliberal policies for quality assurance based on accountability, performativity and metrics, as universities worldwide compete to capture students for future economic gains. Or, as Ozga (2008) writes,

[The] knowledge economy is thus brought into close relationship with economic policy- what matters is what works for the economy. The knowledge economy is a policy meta-narrative that assumes and requires the commodification of knowledge in a system of global production, distribution and exchange (p.265).
Thus, when commenting on neoliberalism Hall et al., (2015) suggest, “Neoliberal ideas seem to have sediment into the western imaginary and become embedded in popular ‘common sense’. They set the parameters-provide the ‘taken-for-granted’- of public discussion, media debate and popular calculation” (pp.18-19). Thus, the objective of this dissertation is to offer a critical account of neoliberalism and how it is transforming the way in which faculty members and administrators experience their role in the academy.

**Significance of Research**

This research, a critical policy study, sought to explore quality assurance policy during a time of neoliberal restructuring of higher education. Thus, the significance of this research is to offer a critical account of neoliberal globalization and how it is changing the way in which faculty members and administrators in higher education experience their role in the academy. More specifically, this research explored how neoliberalism, as an economic and political tool, is trying to establish a monolithic system of higher education where quality is being advocated at the cost of social equity, exploration, and creativity.

Dretchin and Craig (2007), when researching neoliberal governance and education caution us that,

> In the West we live in a culture that is crazy about numbers…Numbers are the ‘hard stuff’, the real world of management-graphs, charts, indices, and ratios. And now, increasingly, numbers and standards define and shape the work of educators. Everyone assumes “you can only manage what you can measure”…But are measures and numbers the right pursuit? Do these measures make for enduring schools? And what effects has this measurement mania created (p. 8)?

This research seeks to address these questions by exploring how six faculty members and three administrators experienced quality assurance as framed through the increasing
neoliberal rationality in higher education. Thus, my hope is to contribute to critical policy studies on neoliberalism in higher education within the Canadian context.

**Theoretical Framework**

This research, as noted, is a policy sociology study; one that recognizes the uneven processes of neoliberal globalization and the challenges posed when researching policy based on a linear concept of the nation-state utilizing blunted tools (Ball, 1990). Stephen J. Ball’s (1993, 1994, 1998) work on the significance of approaching policy analysis through a multi-disciplinary approach argues that “in analysis of complex social issues-like policy- two theories are probably better than one…What we need in policy analysis is a toolbox of diverse concepts and theories” (1993, p.10). Anyon (2009) arguing the importance of critical social theory states, “[w]ithout a theory that paints the whole picture, that fills in the spaces and lines forming the substance of the painting, only a fragmented image is produced” (p.16). Thus, the conceptual framework employed draws from the theoretical toolbox of policy sociology and theories of neoliberal globalization and neoliberal accountability as informed by the research of several scholars situated in critical social theory.

This research stands apart from the traditionalist approach in policy analysis by creating a focus on individual experiences of quality assurance and accountability policy (Ozga, 1987). This research sought to understand the ways in which Quality Assurance policy in higher education are interpreted and experienced. Critical social theories, Anyon (2009) states, “include various types of scholarship that critique domination and subordination, promote emancipatory interests, and combine social and cultural analysis with interpretation, critique, and social explanation” (p.2). As such, the goal of this
research is to offer a critical analysis of the neoliberal rationality and to explore its manifestations for rearticulating conceptions of ‘quality’ in higher education (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2016).

**Policy Sociology**

Critical theorists, in the social sciences, acknowledge the limitation of “current social theory to explain social, political, and economic oppression; it suggests ways that the educational system can address social inequality and generate social change” (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2007). Therefore, critical theory is paramount when considering the multiscalar and uneven processes of neoliberal globalization and its effects on education policy for it acknowledges as its major concerns: “[r]esistance, human agency, oppression, hegemony, consciousness, dialogue, [and] understanding authority/power” (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2000/2007). Policy sociology grew in response to the absence of these considerations in much of the work being done in educational policy studies in the period leading up to the 1980s in the United Kingdom (Ozga, 1987; Ball, 1993; Taylor, 1997).

As a result of the economic crisis experienced by most of the global North Ozga (1987) points to the shift from educational administration to that of management with its emphasis on efficiency and accountability as being a driving factor in much of the theorizing and need for policy sociology. Rizvi and Lingard (2010), when drawing from the work of Ozga (1987), suggest that policy sociology is best understood as “rooted in the social science tradition, historically informed and drawing on qualitative and illuminative techniques” (Ozga 1987, p.144 in Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, p. 50). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) further suggest that, “[i]n our view, policy sociology should not only describe relations of power and processes through which policies are developed and
allocated, but should also point to strategies for progressive change which might challenge oppressive structures and practices” (p.51).

Building from Ozga’s (1987) early concept of policy sociology, Ball (1993, 1997, 1998) envisions an evolving policy ensemble, one that is infused and inspired by globalization. Troubled by the complexities of globalization and the increasing ‘messiness’ of policy research, Lingard and Sellar (2013b) argue how Ball creates “a non-linear, interactive policy cycle approach to understand policy processes from influence to text production to practice” (p. 265). Ball’s early policy sociology perspectives are significant for they contributed to the demand for historical, political, cultural, and economic accounts of policy steering in education, acknowledging that policy is more than just words in a document; while importantly embracing practices that recognized an ‘ad hoc’ and at times ‘messy exchange between the macro and micro. Thus, for Ball “A policy is both contested and changing, always in a state of ‘becoming’, of ‘was’ and ‘never was’ and ‘not quite’; “for any text a plurality of readers must produce a plurality of readings” (Codd 1998, p. 239 in Ball, 1993, p. 11). Therefore, it is the continual development of policy sociology that is of significance to this study as it acknowledges the messiness of policy, the challenges of policy sociology as theory and methodology; and the importance of improvisation in the policy process. Ball (1993) argues,

We cannot rule out certain forms and conceptions of social action simply because they seem awkward or theoretically challenging or difficult. The challenge is to relate together analytically the ad hocery of the macro with the ad hocery of the micro without losing sight of the systematic bases and effects of ad hoc social situations (p.11).
Moving forward to focus on Ball’s work in ‘Big policies/small world’ (1998), with its global lens, Ball offers the reader how his study is of immense importance as it illustrates that while policy challenges and solutions move through global discourses, framed mainly by those in the global North, they are always ‘recontextualized’ and enacted within local settings (p.119). Once more Ball reminds his readers of the messiness of policy suggesting, “Most policies are ramshackle, compromise, hit and miss affairs, that are reworked, tinkered with, nuanced and inflected through complex processes of influence, text production, dissemination and, ultimately, re-creation in contexts of practice” (Ball, 1994 In Ball, 1998, p.126). Lingard and Sellar (2013b) suggest, “Ball’s work clearly demonstrates the significance of the global today in education policy production, discourses and communities, as well as enactment” (p. 276), when one acknowledges the significance of the geo-political shift which, Ball’s contribution to policy sociology has made stronger. Thus, policy sociology as theory becomes a formidable tool that assisted in the overall framing of this study. Ball asking the question, “But how can theory help?” writes,

Theory is a vehicle for ‘thinking otherwise’; it is a platform for ‘outrageous hypotheses’ and for ‘unleashing criticism’. Theory is destructive, disruptive and offers a language for challenge, and modes of thought, other than those articulated for us by dominant others. It provides a language of rigour and irony rather than contingency. The purpose of such theory is to de-familiarise present practices and categories, to make them seem less self-evident and necessary, and to open up spaces for invention of new forms of experience (1995, p. 266).

Ozga (1987; 2019) and Ball’s (1993; 1995; 1998; 2012) perspectives of policy sociology, therefore, are a useful tool within the framework of this study, for these are the
aspects of critical theory, for which policy sociology is a part, that “fill in the spaces and lines forming the substance” (Anyon, 2009, p.16) of my core theoretical concept.

**Policy Practice**

In his widely anthologized paper Ball (1993) expresses concern regarding the challenges that exist within educational policy research and policy sociology itself, when he argues, “[o]ne of the conceptual problems lurking within much policy research and policy sociology is that more often than not analysts fail to define conceptually what they mean by policy” (p.10). In simple terms policy is mediation into action. The difficulty of this over-simplified descriptor is that if policy is only understood as this then what becomes of all the other nuanced or silenced understandings and experiences that complete the policy cycle (Ball et al., 2012)? Therefore, in this study the meaning of policy shall be understood as,

[T]exts and ‘things’ (legislation and national [and/or regional] strategies) but also as discursive processes that are complexly configured, contextually mediated and institutionally rendered. Policy is done by and done to teachers [and others]; they are actors and subjects, subjects to and objects of policy. Policy is written onto bodies and produces particular subject positions (Ball et al., 2012, p. 3).

Unpacking different understandings of policy, Ball (1993) suggests that policies as text are not always understandable; policies can transform as they can mean different things to different people at different times. Policies create challenges for those putting into practice policy text and policy discourse for polices are interpreted and translated within each individual context. Policy enactment, then, is best understood as the inventive practices of “interpretation and translation, that is, the recontextualisation- through reading, writing and talking- of the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualized
practices” (Braun et al., 2011, p.586). The interpretation of policies, Ball et al., (2012) suggests is “an initial reading, a making sense of policy—what does this text mean to us? What do we have to do? Do we have to do anything?” (p.43) Interpretation, then, is an “engagement with the languages of policy, whereas translation is closer to the languages of practice. Translation is a sort of third space between policy and practice” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 45).

Policy practice contrasts with that of policy implementation, which Ball et al., (2012) describe as “generally seen either as a ‘top down’ or ‘bottom up’ process of making policy work, and these studies stress the demarcation between policy and implementation’ (Grantham, 2001, p. 854 in Ball et al., 2012, p. 6). However, to create a more meaningful understanding of how policy is experienced, it becomes important to provide an understanding of policy as text, policy as discourse and the significance of context. In his early work on policy Ball (1994) himself suggests, “But the point I am moving on to is that policy is not one or the other, but both: they are implicit in each other” (p.15).

**Policy as Text**

Policy text, as one form of communication, influences and transforms the social. Policy text, as communication, brings to mind the words of Marshall McLuhan who states *the medium is the message* (1964, p.7). Thus, policy text is greater than the sum of words within a policy document as it not only transmits a message; but also transforms the individual receiving the message itself. Policy text, as a form of literary communication, is unique, for unlike the text of other forms of literature, one writer rarely creates policy text; nor does policy text usually unfold through one singular path (Ball, 1993). As a
result, policy text involves a complex process of encoding and decoding. The theoretical understandings of encoding and decoding are diverse. Ball (1993), drawing from literary theory, shares that encoded and decoded policy text unfolds in “complex ways” (p.11). Encoded text is representational of political and social turmoil, accommodation, articulation and re-articulation (Ball, 1993). Decoded policy text shall be framed as the interpretation of the text, or as Ball (1993) emphasizes, decoding acknowledges first and foremost the significance of the historical, cultural, and economic context of the one who is ‘doing’ the interpreting of policy. Thus, Ball (1993) suggests, “that the policies themselves, the texts, are… not necessarily closed or complete. The texts are the product of compromises at various stages” (p.11). Ball (1993) elaborates, “Thus, the physical text that pops through the school letterbox, or wherever, does not arrive ‘out of the blue’, it has an interpretational and representational history” (p.11).

Policies then, if we take Ball’s (1993) theorization, create questions that must be resolved within the context of those ‘doing’ the interpreting and translating of policy. Therefore, policies do not tell an individual how to act. Policy, as text, suggests and provides a situation whereby a variety of options are available in deciding what to do become framed or influenced by their contextual environment (p. 12). Thus, policy as text does not determine how we practice policy. Or, as Ball notes, “A response must still be put together, constructed in context, off-set against other expectations…the enactment of texts relies on things like commitment, understanding, capability, resources, practical limitations and (importantly) intertextual compatibility” (1993, pp. 12-13). This is an important consideration for it highlights Ball’s central thesis of the policy ensemble, which is the messiness that is created through the interplay of the
macro-micro exchange. Or, alternatively it demonstrates “how agency and structure are implicit in each other” (Ball, 1994, p.15).

**Policy as Discourse**

In Ball’s conceptualization of policy as text there is considerable attention to the relationship between that of agency, the constraints of structure, and the significance of context. Ball offers that the, “effects of policy cannot simply be read off from texts and are the outcome of conflict and struggle between ‘interests’ in context (Ball, 1994, p.21). Thus, Ball (1993) argues, “We read and respond to policies in discursive circumstances that we cannot, or perhaps do not think about” (p.15). However, as noted earlier, ‘action is not determined by policy’ (Ball, 1993, p.12). Thus, when positing the role of discourse in the policy ensemble, Maguire et al., (2011) caution that policy discourse ought not to be viewed as separate and indicate how policy discourses make up and shape an interrelationship between policy texts that generate an understanding and/or meaning. Policy discourse is either then accepted or resisted in the daily life of those in education, which then transform current policy discourse.

Drawing from Foucault, Maguire et al., (2011) consider how discursive “formations ‘converge with institutions and practices, and carry meanings that may be common to a whole period’” (Foucault, 1986, p.118 in Maguire et al., 2011, p.598). Thus, when positing educational policy, “discourses [become] the need to ‘manage behaviour’, to ‘promote effective learning’, to raise standards’, contribute towards what he [Foucault] calls, a sort of ‘sovereign communal ‘meaning’- a heteroglossia (Foucault, 1986, p.118 in Maguire et al., 2011, p. 598). In consideration of the above Ball (1993) writes,
We read and respond to policies in discursive circumstances that we cannot, or perhaps do not, think about... Thus, it limits our responses to change, and leads us to misunderstanding what policy is by misunderstanding what policy does. Further, policy as discourse may have the effect of redistributing ‘voice’. So that it does not matter what some people say or think, only that certain voices can be heard as meaningful or authoritative (p.15).

Policy as discourse, then, becomes important for policy research during an era of ascending neoliberal globalization as it addresses and highlights the powerful and authoritative voices that influence and produce educational policy. Thus, Ball (1990) asserts, “[d]iscourses embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations” (p.17).

Policy as discourse brings into focus the subtleties of language that influence, infuse meaning and exist somewhere between policy as text and practice. Drawing from a Foucauldian philosophy of discourse, Ball (1993) suggests discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak... Discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention” (Foucault, 1977, p. 49 in Ball, 1993, p. 14). Thus, Ball argues, ‘discourses are about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority” (1993, p.14).

Therefore, what is needed within policy analysis, and afforded through policy as discourse, is a way to rethink the manner in which the policy cycle engages with ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ (Ball, 1993). Ball (1993) asserts, “In Foucault’s terms we would see policy ensembles that include, for example, the market, management, appraisal and performativity as ‘regimes of truth’ through which people govern themselves and others.”
Discourse as policy then is concerned with how global discourses connect and shape the discourse and practice of social justice and equity at the local level. Discourse while shaping the experiences of those it makes subject to reflect market value, also creates spaces whereby policy text, policy discourse and policy practice can begin to be rethought differently.

Policy Context

One of the main catalysts in the rise of educational policy research has been the increase of educational policy itself that has been produced and implemented within the context of the global North (Lingard and Lewis, 2016; Maguire et al., 2015; Morgan and Shahjahan, 2014). When researching education within the English context, Maguire et al., (2015) posit as a major driver within this policy phenomenon, the global engagement of standardized testing used to compare and assess student learning and create global rankings. These rankings created “by various global institutes (Mortimore, 2013) have fueled a sense of educational ‘crisis’ and an international policy reaction that has concentrated on raising standards” (Mansell, 2007 In Maguire et al., 2015, p. 488). Context as policy practice quite possibly becomes the glue of the policy cycle as envisaged by Ball and colleagues (2012) for when brought to the foreground, context allows the researcher to engage with the complex processes involved in the policy cycle as it takes into account the historical, cultural, economic and political environments, articulations and re-articulations of the individuals who enact policy.

Thus, the recognition of the complexities of context, as conceptualized by Ozga (1987; 2008; 2019), and Ball et al., (2012) bring to life the real possibility of creating a richer study that begins foremost through the acknowledgement of the role that a deeper
analysis of context plays in the articulations and re-articulations of policy texts, policy discourse and policy practiced. Emphasizing the significance of each of the contextual dimensions involved in the policy cycle provides this research with the very real possibility of revealing the many ‘taken-for-granteds’ in policy research.

**Neoliberal Globalization, Accountability & Education Policy**

The next theoretical concept, which is also of significance in this research, is that of neoliberal globalization and accountability. As the global North transitions from post-World War II Westphalian Keynesian theories of economy whereby the collective well-being of society is sought; to that of an ever-transforming neoliberal construction whereby greater influence is given to marketization, individualization, competition and governance versus government, education is perceived as the economic force and technology to drive and sustain a nation’s economic growth (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010; Peck, 2010; Lingard and Rawolle, 2009; Harvey, 2005/2007).

Thus, it becomes important to understand that an essential supporting aspect of this research is informed through critical studies on the global field of education and the challenges raised regarding the current understanding of neoliberal globalization, accountability, and comparative research in education. Novoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003) when writing of globalization note,

> In a world defined through a flux of communication and interdependent networks, the growing influence of comparative studies is linked to a global climate of intense economic competition and a growing belief in the role of education in the endowment of marginal advantage. The major focus of much of this comparative research is inspired by a need to create international tools and comparative indicators to measure the ‘efficiency’ and the ‘quality’ of education (Novoa and Yariv-Mashal, 2003, pp. 424-425).
Therefore, it would appear that this economic and political re-articulation of education has also experienced a shift towards a culture of comparing, where increasingly “comparative performance data and comparative indicators in relation to national education and training systems (Brown et al., 1997) [act] as a measure of likely economic prosperity and success of economic policies” (Lingard and Rawolle, 2009, p. 9).

Globalization, then, has witnessed the genesis of a new multi-scalar political philosophy, one that has reshaped the connection between the nation-state with that of international organizations giving rise to what is now called ‘global fields’. However, several critical theorists resist the reification often associated with globalization positing the importance of research that explores globalization as a system that operates through written and/or spoken communication, through international organizations and through people themselves and how this becomes translated on the local scale (Dale, 1999; Lingard and Rawolle, 2009; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010; Rezai-Rashti et al, 2016). Ozga and Jones (2006) in their study of globalization and education policy argue that,

> globalization is usually conceptualized in relation to its capacity to dissolve distinctions between the international and the domestic, the global and the local, and its effects are evidenced in core economic activities… Yet globalization foregrounds education and education policy in specific ways that attempt to harness education systems to the rapid and competitive growth and transmissions of technologies and knowledge” (pp. 1-2).

It is this reconstituting of educational policy into which policies of the nation-state are transformed and re-scaled within a new neoliberal global-comparative culture, a culture that is both global and local and shaped through the international lens of “policy as numbers” (Lingard and Rawolle, 2009, p. 9).
Paramount to this research is the theoretical concept of neoliberalism. Wendy Brown (2015) provides a provocative study for those who are concerned with the ever-present neoliberal rationality and the unraveling of democracy. Brown (2015) shares how neoliberalism has become a distinctive feature of current-day logic, one that shapes all domains of humanity in terms of profit and is, as a result, subtly un-threading what has come to be more or less understood as the fabric of liberal-democracy. Thus, Brown (2015) provides her reader with a clear understanding of her argument when she writes,

My argument is not merely that markets and money are corrupting or degrading democracy, that political institutions and outcomes are increasingly dominated by corporate capital, or that democracy is being replaced by plutocracy-rule by and for the rich. Rather, neoliberal reason, ubiquitous today in statecraft and the workplace, in jurisprudence, education, culture and a vast range of quotidian activity, is converting the distinctly political character, meaning, and operation of democracy’s constituent elements into economic ones (p.17).

Furthermore, Brown (2015) states that fundamental to her study is for the reader to embrace “the open and contestable signification of democracy … because I [Brown] want to release democracy from containment by any particular form while insisting on its value in connoting political self-rule by the people, whoever the people are” (p.20). Brown (2015) weaves her discussion on that of democracy into that of neoliberalism, the historical and contextual significance of how neoliberalism is understood and experienced. Thus, the author suggests,

Neoliberalism is a distinctive mode of reason, of the production of subjects, a “conduct of conduct”, and a scheme of valuation… neoliberalism takes diverse shapes and spawns diverse content and normative details, even different idioms. It is globally ubiquitous, yet disunified and nonidentical with itself in space and over time (Brown, 2015, p.21).
However, Brown (2015) states that her study will create a somewhat different optic for the effects of neoliberalism and writes, “I join Michel Foucault and others in conceiving neoliberalism as an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life” (p.21).

Thus, when contemplating the new technologies for what constitutes ‘quality’ in higher education, neoliberal technologies appear to place increasing emphasis on methods for accountability through techniques for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the academic through evidence-based research by numbers (Shanahan, 2009; Ball, 2003). Ball (2003) commenting on this transformation suggests, “[t]he performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of ‘quality’, or ‘moments’ of promotion or inspection” (p.216).

Furthermore, Ball (2003) suggests that to gain deeper insight into the “subjectivities of change and the changing subjectivities” (p.217) of teachers’, one must be prepared to push past the notion of objectivity that currently grounds and steers educational research arguing that such reforms in education not only create changes in the individual; it also changes how the individual interacts with others. Ball (2015a) theorizing the concept of neoliberalism and that of subjectivity states, “subjectivity is a key site of political struggle in the contexts of neoliberalisation and neoliberal governmentality” (p.1). Thus, crucial to Ball’s (2015a) research on individual subjectivity is his concept of resistance, or more profoundly, that which he terms a politics of refusal. Ball (2015a) posits that the distinction between that of resistance and refusal is important as it allows one to move beyond a limited understanding of “power as domination” (p.2). Ball (2015a) when writing of neoliberalism and subjectivity states, “[t]he
point is that neoliberal economies, sites of government and points of contact are also sites for the possibility of refusal. However, the starting point for a politics of refusal is the site of subjectivity. It is a struggle over and against what it is we have become, what it is that we do not want to be” (p.15).

**Structure of Thesis**

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one begins with this introduction, which provides the reader with the research questions, rationale, the significance of this research, and the theoretical framework employed that draw from several scholars situated in critical social theory. Chapter two provides a synthesis of the literature consulted that highlighted the increasing influence of performativity and accountability; the rise of neoliberalism and the global culture of comparison; Quality Assurance policy and the role of international organizations; and lastly, faculty autonomy and creativity. The literature also begins to touch on the potential risks that this present global field of education holds with regard to power, citizenry, democracy and higher education itself. More specifically, the significance of the literature reviewed is three-fold as it revealed that there have been limited qualitative studies of higher education in Ontario as it relates to policies for Quality Assurance, acting as a measure for accountability, and how these may affect the professional experiences of faculty members and administrators. Second, while quality assurance policies and accountability are important, the manner for which quality and accountability has been assessed and analyzed brings to the fore an important point, which is the difference between “assessment as and for learning” versus “assessment of learning” (Lingard and Lewis, 2016, p.23; Lingard et al., 2016). This holds special implication regarding the newly
implemented Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) in Ontario, Canada. Most importantly what the literature consulted revealed is the existing gap in higher education research with regard to the neoliberal rationality that informs what teaching, researching, managing and higher education itself is to mean and be valued as in the 21st Century.

Chapter three provides my methodology and analysis. As a form of qualitative research, I employed both case study and policy sociology as my chosen method and methodology for this study as it created the possibility to illuminate complex issues regarding the neoliberal rationality for quality assurance and accountability in higher education through multiple sources. This allowed my research to investigate, explore, and share the experiential knowledge of those involved as to ‘how’ and ‘why’ quality assurance policies, as a mechanism for accountability, are organizing and shaping their experiences as faculty members and administrators in higher education. Thus, purposeful sampling took place using semi-structured interviews. Following each interview, the coding process took place involving multiple readings, re-readings and the continuous interplay between theory and data, which then led to the unfolding and informing of my research findings.

Chapter four is dedicated to a policy analysis of the newly implemented Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) in Ontario, Canada as it directly ties quality assurance and accountability to performance based funding in higher education. Chapter five and chapter six present my research findings for each of the six faculty members and three administrators from universities located in Ontario, who participated in this study, where a discussion of each case elaborates the themes that came to light through the use of
semi-structured interviews. Chapter seven, the conclusion, provides the reader with a summary of this dissertation that outlines the implications for future research.

Chapter Summary

This research study draws primarily from policy sociology as it set out to investigate how quality assurance policy, as a mechanism for accountability, is changing the experience of six faculty members and three administrators in higher education in Ontario, Canada. At the start of this chapter the reader was presented with an introduction, which included the statement of the research rationale, the research questions that guided my study and the significance of my proposed research. Next the context for this research is presented as informed through literature on Quality Assurance policy in higher education and the neoliberal turn in higher education in Ontario. This chapter also presented the theoretical framework for my research, which provides an understanding for the reader of the key theories that were employed throughout this study.
Chapter 2:  

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter draws from research pertaining to literature regarding neoliberal globalization, accountability and Quality Assurance policy in the context of higher education. More specifically, this chapter provides the opportunity to explore and be introduced to a variety of research grounded in critical social theory as it examines the following themes that emerged: Accountability and Performativity; Neoliberalism and the Global Culture of Comparison; Quality Assurance Policy and the Role of International Organizations; Faculty Autonomy and Creativity; and lastly, the phenomenon of Publish or Perish. Most importantly the literature consulted illuminates an existing gap in research, which is that while there exists a plethora of literature on neoliberalism as theory, there has been limited empirical research exploring neoliberal quality assurance policies, which act as a mechanism for accountability, and the work experiences of academics in higher education.

Accountability, Datafication, & Performativity

As noted previously in this research quality assurance policies and accountability have a tradition in higher education in Ontario, Canada. However, recent policies for quality assurance and accountability are changing the university in ways that are affecting the function and experiences of those in higher education (Shanahan, 2009). For the purpose of this dissertation I define the concept of “accountability” by drawing from the research
of Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti, and Sellar (2016) who assert, “At its simplest, “accountability” refers to either giving an account or being held to account” (p.14).

Furthermore, Lingard et al., (2016) suggest, “The current modes of accountability are top-down; the gaze is largely on the work of schools and teachers and that work is made calculable through its datafication” (p. 14).

When researching globalization and the increase in datafication and educational accountabilities, Lingard and colleagues (2016) speak of the global forces of capital and what they describe as “contemporary capitalism” (p. 3). Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti, and Sellar (2016) suggest how contemporary capitalism has created a “newly intensified phase of performative accountability in education” (Lyotard, 1984; Ranson, 2003 in Lingard et al., 2016, p.3). Furthermore, Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti, and Sellar (2016) argue,

We see the “audit explosion” and the rise of the “audit culture”, documented and analyzed by Power (1997), as part of the phenomenon of “knowing capitalism”. The proliferation of new sources and quantities of data produced by the everyday infrastructures of capitalism- the phenomenon of “big data” that is well-advanced in certain educational applications (Mayer-Schonberger & Cukier, 2013,2014)-raises questions about the place and efficacy of an empirical sociology that has long valorized the collection and analysis of data through sample surveys and substantive in-depth interviews as its distinctive modus operandi and raison d'être (Savage & Burrows, 2007 in Lingard et al., 2016, p. 3).

Therefore, to develop a deeper and more meaningful understanding of quality assurance and accountability in higher education in the 21st Century ought we not to question what datafication possibly overlooks? Shanahan (2009) in her study on accountability in higher education asks, “To whom are we accountable? For what are we accountable? And, what
form should accountability take?” (p.1). These are questions that quantitative researchers often ignore. According to Shanahan (2009) market terms have led to three current trends in accountability in higher education, the foremost being performance indicators that are “imbued with a consumer ideology that encourages the view of education as a commodity” (p.8). As governments demand greater accountability from institutions of higher education based on outcomes that are associated with economic principles, we need to begin to recognize the public discourse that frames accountability through market terms and how this could limit our understanding of quality and accountability in public higher education.

Understanding performativity and the ‘technologies’ employed to embed this growing trend in the global field of education is the purpose of Ball’s study titled *The teacher’s soul and terrors of performativity* (2003). Ball (2003) writes, “Performativity, it is argued, is a new mode of state regulation which makes it possible to govern in an ‘advanced liberal’ way. It requires individual practitioners to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations” (p.215). However, Ball’s (2003) study is not to question the “structures” or the “procedures” in education; the purpose of his study is to question, “the re-forming of relationships and subjectivities, and the forms of new or re-invented discipline to which this gives rise” (p. 217). When speaking of these re-formations Ball states: “education reform is spreading across the globe…like ‘a policy epidemic’…The novelty of this epidemic of reform is that it does not simply change what people, as educators, scholars and researchers do, it changes who they are” (Lenvin, 1998 in Ball, 2003, p.215).
Thus, in his study Ball (2003) sets out to investigate what he posits as the three most significant characteristics of this global transformation in education policy, which are, “the market, managerialism and performativity” (p.215). While these three technologies can be viewed as over-lapping, Ball (2003) cautions of their profound differences when contextually considered suggesting how the lure of this policy trinity in education reform has seduced many nations into the neoliberal restructuring of education that places increasing value on performativity as a measure for accountability.

Ball (2003) provides the reader with a succinct description of the ‘new’ policy technologies and how the metamorphosing of international organizations, such as the OECD, is creating greater emphasis in education on “monitoring systems and the production of information” (p.216) stating it is this that his study will concentrate mainly upon as it is this that Lyotard (1984 in Ball, 2003, p.216) calls the terrors of *performativity*. Ball (2003) then invites the reader into his understanding of what is meant by performativity and argues that one aspect of what becomes crucial is the question of “who controls the fields of judgement” (p.216)? Ball (2003) suggests that, “Performativity is a technology, a culture and mode of regulation that employs judgments, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change-based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)” (p.216).

Central to his research and neoliberalism, Ball (2003) argues “What one wants to attempt here is to ‘get behind’ the objective façade of this aspect of public sector reform and its technical rationalities of reform to examine the subjectivities of change and changing subjectivities which are threatened or required or brought about by performativity” (p.217). Thus, Ball (2003) shares with his reader that to view these
transformations as “simply a strategy of de-regulation” would be limiting for they “are processes of re-regulation” (p.217). This is an important distinction for it speaks to the lack of critical engagement regarding accountability, the use of market discourse that presently frames higher education policy, and what this means to institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

Ball (2003) writing of the “use of new language”; “new roles and subjectivities”; “new vocabulary of performance”; “new ethical systems” and “new modes of description” in education argues that these current transformations can be liberating and successful for some while simultaneously disturbing and debilitating for others (p.218). Ball (2003) also discusses the new role of the manager in education and calls these new managers “technicians of transformation’ (p.219), or what Foucault calls ‘technicians of behaviour’, their task ‘to produce bodies that are docile and capable” (Foucault 1979a: 294 in Ball, 2003, p.219). Thus, Ball argues that the task of the new manager is to create an environment where educators themselves bear the burden of self-imposed accountability.

Ball’s (2003) study is rich with many relevant aspects as it relates to performativity in education being used as a measure for accountability. Possibly of greatest significance though is Ball’s discussion of what he calls the ‘fabrications of performativity’,

Performativity is promiscuous. Fabrications are versions of an organization (or person) which does not exist—they are not ‘outside the truth’ but neither do they render simply true or direct accounts- they are produced purposefully in order ‘to be accountable’. Truthfulness is not the point- the point is their effectiveness, both in the market or for Inspection or appraisal, and in the ‘work’ they do ‘on’ and ‘in’ the organization- their transformational and disciplinary impact. That is to say: “To be audited, an organization must actively transform itself into
an auditable commodity’ (Shore and Wright 1999: 570 in Ball, 2003, pp. 224-225).

The above passage has important implications when considered within the context of higher education as it raises concern over the idea of compliance versus commitment. It also raises concern over how we understand what it means to be ethical. For whether a university is research based or a teaching institution, higher education will require methods other than those that do *not* see “truthfulness as the point” for the evaluation of what is deemed as ethical and quality. Furthermore, drawing from Bernstein (1996), Ball (2003) states, “contract replaces covenant’ or putting it another way, value replaces values- commitment and service are of dubious worth within the new policy regime” (Bernstein, 1996, p. 169 in Ball, 2003, p. 217). Thus, Shanahan (2009) argues, “Performance models of accountability transform the culture of the university and daily working/learning lives of people within them” (p.9).

In the book *Education reform: A critical and post-structural approach* (1994) Ball sets out to explore Education policy, power relations and teachers’ work. Central to his study is the changing subjectivity of teachers as constructed by three modern elements of education within the United Kingdom (UK), “the curriculum, the market and management” (p.48). Ball (1994) suggests, “[a]ll of this seems to indicate a radical attempt to reconstruct and redefine the meaning and purpose of teaching, both as vocational practice and as mental labour” (p.48). Ball (1994) refers to these elements of modern education as *message systems* and that “[t]he three basic message systems of schooling are thus subject to change, and changes in any one system interrelate with and affect the others. In general terms, there is an increase in the technical elements of
teachers’ work and a reduction in the professional” (p.49), which returns me to my concern regarding compliance versus that of commitment.

When discussing the changing environment of the curriculum and the increasing role of standardized tests, national curriculum and pedagogical matters, Lyotard’s (1984) work argues how ‘the legitimation of education through performativity’ and the increasing role of the state in education practices, the decreasing voice of the educator in the formation of these policies, is suspect, which leads Ball (1994) to suggest that “In all this there is increasing concern about the quality, character and content of teachers’ labour and increasingly direct attempts made by the state to shape the character and content of classroom practice” (Ball, 1994, p.50). This is an important point for arguments made on the public value of the humanities in higher education and the implications of this for an educated-democratic society (Brown, 2015).

The second element that Ball (1994) focuses on is the market in which Ball (1994) argues, “[t]he introduction of market forces into the relations between schools means that teachers are now working within a new value context, in which image and impression management are becoming as important as the educational process” (p.51). This element holds profound implications for the professionalization of faculty members and their research. Brown (2015) argues,

This professionalization aims at making young scholars not into teachers and thinkers, but into human capitals who learn to attract investors by networking long before they “go on the market”, who “workshop” their papers, “shop” their book manuscripts, game their Google Scholar counts and “impact factors”, and above all, follow the money and the rankings. “Good investment” is the way departments speak of new hires, and “entrepreneurial” has become a favored term for describing exceptionally promising young researchers; it is deployed to capture both a young researcher’s capacity to
parlay existing accomplishments into new ones and the more quotidian business of grant getting (p.195).

This passage speaks directly to the dramatic changes taking place in higher education with regard to how one is to understand what being accountable is to mean. Is being accountable as an academic in higher education attracting research grants? Or is being accountable the number of scholarly, peer-reviewed, highly ranked journal articles that one publishes in an academic year? Is being accountable simply accounting? What is meant by ‘accountability’?

Shanahan (2009) argues that accountability in higher education is more than “counting inputs and outputs”. This is an important critique; one that raises questions regarding the invisible work of faculty members and administrators when quality and accountability are reduced to only ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’. She (2009) suggests, “measuring quality is fraught with problems of accuracy and adequacy” (p.11). Furthermore, Shanahan (2009) argues, “Too often, critics claim that quality assurance does not ensure, or even demonstrate quality let alone accountability- that is, are we even measuring what we think we are measuring?” (p. 11). Again, the argument is not that quality and accountability are not of importance in higher education. They most certainly are. However, if the current methods employed are not demonstrating either then what are they demonstrating and for whom? Accountability and what this means to the restructuring of higher education as an institution, the individual and to democracy itself during an era of heightened neoliberalism bears greater attention. As Brown (2015) succinctly argues, “to support good institutions, the people must be antecedently what only good institutions can make them…The survival of democracy depends upon a
people educated for it, which entails resisting neoliberalization of their institutions and themselves” (p.200).

**Neoliberalism & the Global Culture of Comparison**

The phenomena of globalization and neoliberalism over the course of the past forty years have received increasing attention when researching education. Thus, at this juncture it becomes important to revisit for the reader an understanding of each as informed by several scholars. While the meaning of both of these two phenomena is not fully agreed upon within the academy it is necessary to name them (Hall et al, 2011). As shared within the theoretical framework, globalization has witnessed the genesis of a new multi-scalar political philosophy, one that has reshaped the connection between the nation-state with that of international organizations giving rise to what is now called ‘global fields’.

However, several scholars resist the reification often associated with globalization positing the importance of research that explores globalization as a system that operates through written and/or spoken communication, through international organizations and through people themselves and how this becomes translated on the local scale (Dale, 1999; Lingard and Rawolle, 2009; Robertson, 2006; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010).

Ozga and Jones (2006) when researching globalization and education state, “globalization is usually conceptualized in relation to its capacity to dissolve distinctions between the international and the domestic, the global and the local, and its effects are evidenced in core economic activities… Yet globalization foregrounds education and education policy in specific ways that attempt to harness education systems to the rapid and competitive growth and transmissions of technologies and knowledge” (pp. 1-2). It is this reconstituting of educational policy into which policies of the nation-state are
transformed and re-scaled within a new neoliberal global comparative culture, a culture that is both global and local and shaped through the international lens of “policy as numbers” (Lingard and Rawolle, 2009, p. 9).

In the global North theories of neoliberalism have come to be understood either “as a system of ideas circulated by a network of right-wing intellectuals, or as an economic system mutation resulting from crises of profitability in capitalism” (Connell and Dados, 2014, p. 117). As noted earlier in this research, as the global North transitions from post-World War II Westphalian Keynesian globalization to an emergent neoliberal construction whereby greater influence is given to marketization and that of governance versus government, education is now perceived as the economic force to drive and sustain a nation’s economic growth (Lingard and Rawolle, 2009; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti, and Sellar (2016) suggest that the rise in governance, from that of government, is linked to the rise in New Public Management (NPM). More specifically discussing network governance Lingard et al., (2016) in their book argue that governance “focus [is] on the relationships between, and the new influence of individuals and organizations that span the boundaries between governments, philanthropies, and business (especially finance capital and edubusinesses)” (p.13). Thus, this economic and political re-articulation of education has also experienced a shift towards a culture of comparison, where increasingly “comparative performance data and comparative indicators in relation to national education and training systems (Brown et al., 1997) [act] as a measure of likely economic prosperity and success of economic policies” (Lingard and Rawolle, 2009, p. 9).

However, each of these articulations of neoliberalism fails to capture the social, cultural,
and political practices of the neoliberal rationality within higher education and what this might mean to academics who experience higher education policy. Thus, it is best to provide the multiplicity of ways that neoliberalism has come to be understood in studies that are situated in critical theory.

Au and Ferrare (2015) in their study on the marketization of education reform begin by sharing with the reader the complexity in trying to define neoliberalism due to geography, culture and politics. Following Ball’s (2012) argument of the multiplicity of meaning regarding neoliberalism, Au and Ferrare (2015) write,

Ball (2012) is cautious with his use of the term “neoliberal”, particularly because of how widely it is used and the multiplicity of possible meanings that people ascribe to it-such that it can lose all purposeful meaning. We explicitly recognize this as an issue here, because all words can be sliding signifiers whose exact meaning shifts depending on who is using it, where they are using it, when they are using it, and to what audience they are speaking (Gee, 1996 in Au and Ferrare, p. 2).

The use of the term ‘sliding signifier’ is intriguing as it reminds us of the significance of context; context that is shaped and influenced by historical, political, cultural and economic constructs that when applied to neoliberalism can manifest and produce varying understandings and experiences of what neoliberalism means as theory and practice. The term ‘sliding signifier’ is also of interest for while it creates caution regarding the condensing of concepts such as neoliberalism it also points to the importance of studies such as those conducted by Ball and several other scholars whose research is sensitive to the debilitating effects of neoliberal politics in regard to individuals, society, and our environment.
Au and Ferrare (2015), draw heavily from the work of Harvey (2004a, 2004b, 2007) and Lipman (2011), to further unpack the multiple ways, in which neoliberalism is understood. More specifically, the authors focus on education and “neoliberalism as a massive restructuring structure” (Au and Ferrare, 2015, p.3) by creating a discussion on possibly the most acknowledged, and at the same time ignored, phenomenon due to neoliberalism- the restructuring of government to governance and the serious implications of this on education. Au and Ferrare (2015) note,

Critical to any discussion of neoliberalism generally, but particularly neoliberalism in education, is the role of the state within the neoliberal framework…As the neoliberal state shrinks (itself the result of the neoliberal commitment to deregulation and market forces), responsibilities for governing are increasingly shifted from democratically elected state governments towards private bodies that are unelected and unaccountable to the voting public. As Lipman (2011) notes this is a radical shift from government to governance…(original emphasis, p.4).

Thus, Au and Ferrare’s (2015) study holds profound implications for public higher education in Canada, a nation with a long tradition of democratic decentralization in education, when considering the increasing policy steering power of organizations such as the OECD, its increasing authority through data by numbers and promotion of a culture of comparison in education.

Jenny Ozga (2009) in her research on education also discusses the connection between recent forms of governance in education, intelligent accountability, and the rise and dependence on comparative assessment data created through national testing regimes. Ozga (2009) writes, “Data production and management were and are essential to the new governance turn; constant comparison is its symbolic feature, as well as a distinctive mode of operation” (p. 150). Furthermore, when commenting on this shift in
education, Ozga (2009) shares that there have been many who have reported this turn as a consequence of neoliberalism, acting as a development strategy, that reflect the “principles in the design of reform and restructuring programmes, so that decentralisation and devolution were pursued with the aim of enabling the market to operate effectively” (p. 151).

Wendy Brown (2015), as shared previously, when researching neoliberalism and higher education has created a salient study for those who are concerned about the unraveling of democracy and the ever-present neoliberal agenda, which operates in all ‘spheres’ of life. Brown (2015) provides definitions for both democracy and neoliberalism, suggesting that while both may hold contested understandings it is important to know her own position with regard to these terms. Brown (2015) also provides four main critiques of neoliberalism: “intensified inequality, crass or unethical commercialization, ever-growing intimacy of corporate and finance capital with the state, and economic havoc” (pp. 28-30).

Brown (2015) identifies new ways for which the economization of neoliberal policies is currently rationalized and constructing the neoliberal subject. Unlike liberal economization, which still contained a political orientation, neoliberal economization states “we are everywhere homo oeconomicus and only homo oeconomicus… neoliberal homo oeconomicus takes it shape as human capital seeking to strengthen its competitive positioning and appreciate its value, rather than as a figure of exchange or interest”(p. 33). Furthermore, Brown (2015) provides a series of pertinent questions in her research on neoliberalism and lists a number of consequences of the new ‘economization of
everything’ and while the following quote is of length, it is possibly one of the more profound within this study. Brown (2015) argues,

[G]overnance according to market metrics displaces classic liberal democratic concerns with justice and balancing diverse interests. But neoliberalization extinguishes something else. As economic parameters become the only parameters for all conduct and concern, the limited form of human existence that Aristotle and later Hannah Arendt designated as “mere life” and that Marx called life “confined by necessity” – concern with survival and wealth acquisition- this limited form and imaginary becomes ubiquitous and total across classes. Neoliberal rationality eliminates what these thinkers termed “the good life” (Aristotle) or “the realm of freedom” (Marx), by which they did not mean luxury, leisure, or indulgence, but rather the cultivation and expression of distinctly human capacities for ethical and political freedom, creativity, unbounded reflection, or invention (p. 43).

Thus, associating the above perspective with higher education I am reminded of Robertson et al. (2012) who argue: “not only are universities and higher education changing the raison d’être, but a range of economic, political and cultural transformations are under way-locally, nationally, regionally and globally- of which higher education is a key part” (p.8).

As a result of both globalization and neoliberalism, Lingard and Sellar (2013a) following Sahlberg (2011) argue, there has emerged in the global field of education an increase in comparative measures,

[O]f new international comparative assessments and national testing: instantiations of new forms of accountability in schooling that have become pervasive and now constitute what Sahlberg (2011) has called the global education reform movement (GERM)…This is a neo-liberal framework of education policy with the following features: prescribed curriculum, focus on literacy and numeracy, test-based accountability, standardised teaching and learning and market-oriented reforms ( p.19).
Lingard and Sellar (2013a) in their study provide a critical investigation of this global education reform movement by conducting a critical analysis on the rise of the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The central focus for Lingard and Sellar’s (2013a) study is the globalization of education in an “emergent post-national world” (p.19) and the goal of the OECD’s PISA in creating “a global education field with cross-field effects into national education policy fields” (p. 20). The central argument for the authors is the prominence of the global education policy field and how through the OECD, PISA becomes an economic tool for policies in education. This carries implications when considering the development of the OECD’s piloted project AHELO, the recently implemented Strategic Mandate Agreement for higher education in Ontario, Canada and what this could mean to quality, access, and diversity in higher education.

Loïc Wacquant (2013) arguing the need for a distinction between neoliberalism as an ideology and the significance of neoliberalism as a sociological concept suggests,

[N]eoliberalism is not the coming of King Market, as the ideology of neoliberalism would have us believe, but the building of a particular kind of state. Following Max Weber, neoliberalism is best defined not by its end but by its means. For it is not primarily an economic venture, as classical liberalism was: it is a political project of market-conforming state-crafting (2012/2013, p.8, original emphasis).

Hence, when considering neoliberalism and its effects on educational policy I am reminded once more of the work by Lingard and colleagues (2016) on globalization and educational accountabilities when they assert that they view “globalizing educational accountabilities as a phenomenon in which critical scholarship has a stake and an active role to play” (p.161). The travelling of policies globally has therefore created recent interest in educational research as it seeks to deepen our understanding on the
significance of a critical and qualitative approach that moves beyond the global-national discourse that has been the focus of many investigations on higher education policy in the past.

The reconstitution of ‘quality’ through a neoliberal culture of comparison that is framed through a globally dominant, yet narrow, understanding of accountability carries with it “political and ideological ramifications” (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2016, p.168) that bear consideration in empirical research on higher education. As the importance of a cultural, political, economic and historical context raises our awareness of how neoliberal globalization is transforming policy in higher education (Robertson et al, 2012) it also points to that which Brown (2015) describes as the “defunding” of democracy (p.200). Brown (2015) posits, “Indeed, one crucial effect of neoliberal rationality is to reduce the desire for democracy” (p.200). These become important considerations for a world in turmoil (Beck, 2012).

Quality Assurance and the Role of International Organizations

Shahjahan (2012) in his study on globalization and the role of international organizations (IO’s) reports of the increasing influence and power of international organizations in educational politics hoping to create a clearer understanding of the four international organizations that are deemed the global heavy weights in policy steering: the World Bank (WB), the OECD, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and The European Union (EU). Shahjahan’s (2012) thesis is that the research of international organizations by those in the university is critical to comprehending higher education policy. Thus, he suggests that the four international organizations mentioned create a springboard in knowledge generated regarding their
own significance and the role they play in steering higher education policy worldwide. Shahjahan (2012) argues that each of the international organizations mentioned achieve this as a result of the following,

First, all four IOs have a global scope of influence. Second, they possess multiple instruments of influence and conduct various supranational activities in higher education. Finally, when higher education researchers refer to IOs in the higher education arena, one or more of these four IOs are usually cited as examples (p. 370).

As a result of the above, international organizations such as the OECD are deemed experts and their knowledge legitimate as global education policy actors by both member states and non-member states seeking to transform higher education for the demands of the knowledge economy. Thus, Robertson and Kedzierski (2016) suggest that, “[t]he world is on the move, and so too are its universities, teachers and students” (Altbach and Knight, 2007 in Robertson and Kedzierski, 2016, p. 3).

In their critical study of the OECD’s role as a global education authority and the rise of the test culture Morgan and Shahjahan (2014) argue, “the early stages of test production by IOs are significant sites in which the global governance of education is legitimated and enacted” (p.192). Thus, the purpose of their research is to present “how the OECD legitimates its power, expertise, and defines ‘what counts’ in education” (2014, p.192). Morgan and Shahjahan (2014) do this through the investigation of what they describe as the “three mechanisms of educational governance” (p.192) that is utilized by the OECD, the first being “building on past OECD successes”; “assembling knowledge capacity”; and thirdly, “deploying bureaucratic resources” (p.192). Morgan
and Shahjahan (2014) in their study on the role of international organizations as ‘significant sites’ in which the global governance of education is legitimized argue,

By focusing on the stages of assessment production, we gain insight into IOs’ governance processes, such as the techniques to instill certain forms of knowledge or to transfer educational practices from the supranational to the national, deployed as the assessment is being built. Once the assessment is built, evaluation policies and practices have already been transferred by the IO to the participating country. Close attention to the process and techniques through which IOs construct tests can enhance our understanding of how IOs acquire legitimate power to define what counts in education (p.193).

The above passage is significant for while PISA and the piloted Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) are top-down techniques for measurement developed by the OECD to assess student performance, the implication for ‘what counts’ as quality in higher education becomes narrowed as what counts as knowledge becomes associated with measurable outcomes. Also, for a nation such as Canada, where higher education is said to be a provincial jurisdiction, where university’s operate with a degree of autonomy, the increasing legitimized authority of international organizations, such as the OECD and its policy steering power holds strong implications for the development of higher education policy recommendations. This concern can be witnessed in the following statement, which was presented to HEQCO by an advisory panel on the state of quality in higher education in Ontario,

System-level planning will require the government to be more active and assertive. Bottom-up process like that used by the [Strategic Mandate Agreement] SMA exercise will not produce the system changes we believe are necessary. The government will need to demonstrate discipline, consistency and commitment to direct changes over the several years it will take to implement them (HEQCO, 2013, p.7).
Morgan and Shahjahan (2014) in their study provide an understanding of the theoretical concepts that inform their research such as what they mean by ‘governance’ and ‘soft governance’. The authors also provide their theoretical position, which is situated within sociological institutionalism. While many aspects of this study are significant, the following is possibly of greatest importance within the scope of this research,

Given the global interest in using tools such as PISA and AHELO to measure and enhance educational outcomes, our analysis raises many questions about the role of standardised assessment and learning outcome tools for educational quality improvement… it raises questions about the relationship and tradeoffs between quality and autonomy, the importance of local knowledge in a highly connected world, and the role and reach of international assessment tools within local contexts (Morgan and Shahjahan, 2014, p.203).

While Morgan and Shahjahan’s (2014) research demonstrates the importance of developing a stealth understanding of international organizations with regard to neoliberal policy travelling, it is the above passage that I deem as profound for it questions the trade-offs that come at the expense of seeking a harmonized system of higher education created through top-down standardized-comparative techniques of what ‘counts as quality education’.

When researching within the Canadian context Jones and Weinrib (2011) in their study on globalization and higher education provide a brief mapping of the colonization of Canada and the development of higher education within that country. They state that the purpose of their research is to create a critical analysis of “globalization and higher education in Canada by focusing on the impact of, and resistance to, globalizing pressures in selected policy areas within the Canadian context…internationalization,
including student and faculty mobility; research and innovation; and evaluation and quality assurance” (p. 222). Very early into this study the authors are quick to emphasize how decentralization of higher education in Canada becomes quite significant to the discourse on globalization and the global push to standardize and harmonize higher education as recommended by the OECD and the EU’s Bologna Process project (Jones and Weinrib, 2011).

In their concluding remarks Jones and Weinrib (2011) build on earlier work from Slaughter and Leslie’s (1997) book Academic Capitalism, which is a comparative study of higher education policy in the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, and Canada. While Slaughter and Leslie (1997) are said to report many similarities between each geographical region and their response to the pressures of globalization the authors of Academic Capitalism (1997), Jones and Weinrib (2011) report, are also thought to question, “whether Canada was an outlier or a partial resistor to international pressures” (p. 236) prompting Jones and Weinrib (2011) to suggest, “fourteen years later, with the advantage of hindsight, the answer is no-and yes” (p. 236). They conclude their study with many significant thoughts regarding higher education in Canada. The authors suggest that Canada does not have a ‘system’ of higher education due to its unique form of decentralization when they share,

Higher education in Canada is not a ‘system’ but rather the sum of locally regulated activities, often premised on high levels of university autonomy. Canada’s federal government does play a strong role in R&D policy, and the result is a chaotic policy environment with differences in policy approach to higher education by province, and where institutions are pushed and pulled in different directions by federal and provincial policies…the lack of a strong central authority has led to a policy environment in which there is no integrated national strategy or strategic planning, where there is an
inadequate data and policy research infrastructure, and where there is limited harmonization across provincial systems (Jones and Weinrib, 2011, p. 237).

However, the above quote creates interest when considering the role of Council of Ministers for Education Canada (CMEC), the globalization of educational policy, the policy reach of such projects as the OECD’s AHELO, and what this means to measures of quality assurance and accountability.

Lingard and Sellar (2013a) in their study on the OECD and the global focus on education as human capital suggest, “[s]ince the end of the Cold War and the related rise of a global economy, education has become a central element of economic policy for most nations. This has led to an emphasis in education policy on human capital production across all sectors, with quality and quantity of human capital seen as central for the global competitiveness of the national economy” (p. 20). The authors go on to state that while the manners in which these policies give way reflect the diverse context of each nation, there has also been a “convergence” (Lingard and Sellar, 2013a, p.21) of these global policies. This speaks directly of the OECD and their role as ‘policy expert’ that has been afforded them by individual member nations (Lingard and Sellar, 2013a).

Speaking to the legitimized power of the OECD in regard to globalization and educational policy Lingard and colleagues (2016) assert,

In the 21st century, the OECD, as an administrative apparatus for mobilizing powerful forms of networked governance, has become the major international organization in respect of education policy and is helping to constitute the global educational policy field through its exercise of soft governance and panoptic modes of power to shape the perceptions of politicians, policy makers, and a variety of different publics concerned with education (p. 39).
In the concluding chapter of their book on the rise of the OECD’s PISA in framing educational accountabilities Lingard et al., (2016) argue how the OECD has been very influential in “establishing and sustaining a global politics of mutual accountability in education” (p.146). While scholars situated within critical policy studies increasingly turn their attention to the effect of neoliberal globalization on the formation of educational policy in an effort to unpack the implication of learning for economic development and what this might mean to issues of democracy, social justice and equity (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2016; Brown, 2015) there remains much work to be done. This work will be complex and is required to highlight the immensity of the global shift-taking place in higher education. This is a shift, some might argue, from a “social democratic education policy towards a dominant neoliberal education reform agenda” (Singh, 2014, p. 364).

**Faculty Autonomy and Creativity**

When reviewing literature on faculty autonomy and creativity *The Slow Professor* (2016) became an insightful resource. The authors, Berg and Seeber (2016) write in the style of a novella fused with the traditional monograph and as such draw not only from theoretical concepts but also a variety of literary genres. They state that, “The argument of *The Slow Professor* is supported by empirical studies conducted in fields such as sociology, medicine, information science, and labour studies and it is also rooted in personal experience” (Berg and Seeber, 2016, p. viii). The purpose of this anecdotal account of higher education in the twenty-first century “is not to reveal “individual characteristics” but to “amplify the political context that make these events possible and … provide the ground from which a collective conversation may begin about current social, political and
intellectual life in the academy” (Lewis, 2005 in Berg and Seeber, 2016, p. viii). Thus, inspired by the ‘Slow Movement’ Berg and Seeber (2016) write,

We are Slow Professors. We believe that adopting the principles of Slow into our professional practice is an effective way to alleviate stress, preserve humanistic education, and resist the corporate university… In the corporate university, power is transferred from faculty to managers, economic justifications dominate, and the familiar “bottom line” eclipses pedagogical concerns. Slow Professors advocate deliberation over acceleration. We need time to think, and so do our students. Time for reflection and open-ended inquiry is not a luxury but is crucial to what we do (pp. ix-x).

Berg and Seeber (2016) argue that it will be through a collective global movement that the ‘Slow Professor’ can resist the present neoliberal university agenda of effectiveness and accountability that has been framed using the corporate model and will restore the university to an environment where one can begin to contemplate, deliberate, and discuss once again.

The idea of a collective social movement may create questions for those who might not believe in its possibility. However, I do believe that all around us we are beginning to see the rise of collective social movements that are once again challenging the present status quo in public services such as health care, education and higher education. This politics of possibility has presented itself more recently in social actions such as The Chilean Winter (2011), The Arab Spring (2011) and the Occupy [Wall Street] Movement (2011). While again, some might argue the effectiveness of these social movements the attention generated have created change if only in that they are raising awareness of the conditions and pressures that individuals experience as a result of neoliberalism.

Writing of the pressures experienced in higher education Berg and Seeber (2016) focus on those placed on professors not only to publish, but also to publish a lot, and to
publish in scholarly journals for it is this measure that university’s increasingly use for their yearly evaluation of scholarly performance. Berg and Seeber (2016) following the work of Collini (2012) state, “Not everything that counts can be counted”. One of the authors (for you never really know which is sharing their anecdotal experience) recounts a time from their childhood when they were competing for a ‘prize’ by having to put together a puzzle as fast as they could. Distracted by watching how quickly their competitors were advancing they fell behind and “tied for last place” (Berg and Seeber, 2016, p. 52), which leaves us to ponder the deleterious effect of scholarly evaluations framed by a neoliberal discourse of what counts as quality. Furthermore and significant to pressures of university rankings and competition Berg and Seeber (2016) note,

Rebranding scholars as key players in the knowledge economy, the corporate university emphasizes instrumentalism and marketability. Thomas C. Pocklington and Allan Tupper contend that “Canadian universities now prize research that brings new facts to light … Frontier research has replaced reflective inquiry, a complex process involving disciplined thought about major issues and the quality of existing knowledge, as the dominant concept of university research” (2002, p. 7 in Berg and Seeber, 2016, p. 53).

Berg and Seeber create an interesting discussion on the concept of ‘time’ as a resource for professors and the idea of the significance of understanding versus knowledge production as posited by Collini (2012). The authors’ share,

He [Collini] argues it is vital… to emphasize that the goal of the work in the humanities, in particular, is better described as ‘understanding’ than as ‘knowledge” (What Are Universities for? 77): “Publication … is … not always a matter of communicating ‘new finding’ or ‘proposing a ‘new theory’. It is often the expression of the deepened understanding which some individual has acquired through much reading, discussion, and reflection, on a topic which has been in some sense ‘known’ for many generations (Collini, 2012, p. 123 in Berg and Seeber, 2016, pp. 55-56).
This passage is of great significance to what the academy refers to now as ‘knowledge mobilization’; for not all research will uncover some ‘new finding’ or create some ‘new theory’, yet what it could do is prick at the conscience and have us ponder questions such as ‘how’ or ‘why’?

Researching academic autonomy, Simon Marginson (2008) writes of what he refers to as intellectual creativity. His research is a qualitative study with the “specific purpose to ground, in political philosophy, a sociological investigation into the effects of the NPM in the constitution of academic self-determination and the scope of the radical-creative imagination” (Marginson, 2008, p. 272). More specifically Marginson (2008) states that he is “especially interested in the conditions and drivers of what is here termed the radical-creative imagination” (p.269).

The radical-creative imagination, Marginson (2008) posits, “is manifest in intellectual “breaks”, apparently sudden disjuncture or leaps in the relevant field of knowledge that cannot be exhaustively explained in terms of path dependency… Arguably, it is difficult to have path breaking academic creativity without self-determination” (p.269). Thus, to understand the radical-creative imagination of the academic, Marginson (2008) sets out to explore the role of self-determination or what he at times refers to as self-determining freedom of researchers and scholars. Self-determining freedom is contextual and universal when situated in higher education. It exhibits both a “commonality…and often pronounced differences between fields of study” (Marginson, 2008, p. 270). However, the purpose of his investigation, Marginson (2008) asserts, “is to explore another kind of plurality: the different aspects or elements
of freedom that (according to the subsequent argument) enter into the constitution of self-determining academic freedom” (p.270).

Marginson (2008) traverses from a brief discussion on the contextual differences of self-determined academic freedom to a discussion of the variety of “conditions” that constitute self-determined freedom, such as, “laws and regulations, techniques of government and managing, administrative and financial systems, publishing regimes, academic hierarchies, and so on” (p.270). However, Marginson (2008) suggests that the focus of his study on the self-determined academic will be that of the conditions which are created by and through “the practices of organization and government known as new public management (NPM) and implemented to at least some degree in most university systems around the world during the last two decades” (p.270).

Marginson (2008) explains some of the different techniques used by NPM as framed through the economic philosophies of F.A. Hayek, Friedman and the Chicago School. Marginson (2008) incorporates the work of Amartya Sen for a deeper understanding of neoliberalism in the twenty-first century. Wanting to investigate these transformations Marginson (2008) turns to the work of Foucault explaining,

Of course, focus on the transformation rather than the negation of forms of freedom is not a new idea. It [the transformation rather than the negation of freedom] was a core argument of Michel Foucault two decades ago and is utilized by social theorists and historians working in post-Foucauldian tradition. Such an approach enables a more nuanced account of power in sites such as universities (p.271).

Thus, when researching faculty members’ and administrators’ experiences in the university it is not enough to focus solely on what has changed but how and why these
changes have occurred, are occurring, and how these changes are transforming, or not, the individuals work within this study.

Hayek’s notion of autonomy and Sen’s concept of well-being and agency are central to Marginson’s (2008) thesis on academic freedom and self-determination. With regard to the concepts of well-being and agency Marginson (2008) writes,

> Sen’s contrast between well-being and agency has direct applicability in academic life. Many part-time faculty choose poorly paid temporary jobs rather than more secure and better paid employment elsewhere in order to pursue their vocation. For them agency freedom takes priority over well-being (p.277).

The concepts of agency and well-being become an element of future research on higher education that will require further exploration for understanding the role of neoliberalism and how this phenomenon is transforming the professional experience of faculty members’ and administrators’. Marginson (2008) also draws significantly from a study on academic values conducted by Mary Henkel (2005), which explored “the notions of agency freedom and the pursuit of “good”. When investigating these “notions” Henkel (2005) finds that faculty identities are,

> [F]irst and foremost” shaped in conversation in stable academic communities. “Individuals learn not only a language but a way of understanding the world through ideas, cognitive structures and experience expressed in that language”. Identity is constructed in a continuous reflexive process that is a “synthesis of (internal) self definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others (Henkel, 2005, p.157 in Marginson, 2008, p. 278).

This raises important questions regarding the power of language, the individual work experiences of faculty members and administrators, and how these experiences might be self-imposed or externally driven? Thus, a politics of possibility does exist if we are to
re-imagine a new language, one that “moves forward with the knowledge, skills, and social relations necessary for the creation of new modes of agency, social movements, and democratic economic and social policies” (Giroux, 2014, p.204).

**Publish or Perish**

Lee and Lee (2013) have conducted a timely study of the increasing trend of ‘publish or perish’ that is situated within the context of higher education in South Korea. The authors of this research posit that their over-arching thesis is to encourage academics to become more actively critical of the present neoliberal policies in higher education with regard to the increasing pressure to publish. The authors argue that by promoting the significance of publishing in scholarly journals using the English language is to create an absence in knowledge mobilization and further becomes a subversive tool for acknowledging and rewarding “certain kinds of knowledge and languages as more valuable than others” (Lee and Lee, 2013, p. 228).

Lee and Lee (2013) investigate the experience of publish or perish “from a critical language policy perspective” (p.220). The purpose for Lee and Lee’s (2013) research is to conduct a,

study [that] is a small-scale qualitative inquiry investigating the language policy at the USK and its consequences for knowledge production. We approach the examination of USK’s policy from a critical language policy perspective because of the unequal power relations involved in publishing in English-language journals for professors who use English as an additional language and the enforcement of top-down policies by university administration (Tollefson 2006 in Lee and Lee, 2013, p. 220).

Thus, the issue of these top-down policies, “For professors, who may or may not be proficient in English academic writing, they must find time to handle teaching and
administrative responsibilities, in addition to navigating academic publishing within a limited time period” (Lee and Lee, 2013, p.215). This quote is of specific relevance as it reveals the pressures to ‘publish or perish’ that appear to be global and thus is an important consideration regarding neoliberalism and higher education. This also is an area of particular importance as it illustrates the argument made by Brown (2015) regarding neoliberalism, “as an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life” (p.30).

Furthermore, the study by Lee and Lee (2013) brings forth the dire need for greater attention in empirical research to neoliberal practices in higher education and what this rationality could mean to faculty members and administrators regarding knowledge mobilization. Their work revealed an existing gap in research on neoliberalism and the dire need for qualitative research to create more meaningful investigations into education policy and the experiences of academics in the university. Therefore, Lee and Lee (2013) write, “[w]hat deserves further investigation is the policy’s consequences for professors and how they negotiate the ideologies at play” (p.219). Thus, the importance of education policy research regarding what counts as quality is that we argue for greater attention to how we research and come to understand quality and knowledge mobility in higher education (Robertson 2006; 2008; 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; 2016).

Discussing knowledge mobility and the phenomenon of publish or perish, Lee and Lee (2013) also provide reasons as to why academics publish in International Indexed Journals (IIJ), such as monetary reward, professional advancement, and knowledge mobilization. However, possibly the most salient point made in their study is this,
Consequently, the use of English in publishing is naturalized and helps to justify neoliberalism, where the dominant ideology is uncontested. Taken together the institutionalization of a promotion policy based exclusively on publishing, mechanisms such as the incentive system and graduate training in English, and the added benefits of international exposure, publishing in IIJs reflects the process where the ideology of English as natural turns into a commonplace practice of publishing in English (p.225).

This passage leads us to contemplate what the alternative to English-language journals could be and how we in the global North might begin to embrace and learn from knowledge that is situated as being ‘outside’.

Continuing with the literature on ‘publish or perish’, Min and Mohamed (2013) provide an account of this experience in higher education which illustrates the degree for which neoliberalism is now embedded in the academy. The purpose of their research, Min and Mohamed (2013) suggest, was “initiated by the dean’s office of an educational faculty in Malaysia to investigate the local factors that would promote productivity in journal publication amongst faculty members. The ultimate aim of this study is to identify catalyst strategies to improve the publication index at the faculty level” (p.144).

Furthermore, the authors share, “[s]cholarly output, in the form of journal publication is a key indicator in various levels of university performance. It contributes to university ranking, faculty ranking and academicians’ scholarship credentials. Therefore, scholarly output has become a standard measure to determine intake, promotion and tenure renewal of academicians at the faculty and university levels” (p.143).

Min and Mohamed (2013) in their study on scholarly publishing argue how publishing in academic journals at present is deemed as,
[T]he most scholarly output to showcase scholarship credentials amongst academicians. This publication output has almost replaced the traditional book publication (Lyytinen, Baskerville, Livari, & Te’eni, 2007) due to its nature of publication that suits well with modern process of knowledge appraisal, i.e., ‘quick and short’… Any new knowledge or new discovery is almost instantly exposed to debates and re-investigations upon its release… With the increasing popularity of open-access online journals (Giles, 2007), this process of new knowledge generation and regeneration is becoming a global norm (p.143).

The above passage causes reflection on the significance of Berg and Seeber’s (2016) discussion regarding the perils of higher education due to the “challenges of the frantic pace and standardization of contemporary culture” (Berg and Seeber, 2016, p. X).

Vannini (2006) researching the phenomenon of ‘Publish or Perish’ provides a very interesting study that is situated within the context of higher education in the United States (US). Vannini (2006) in his study sets out to explore the experience of authenticity and inauthenticity of forty-six faculty members from a public university and from a broad range of disciplines. His research argues, from a phenomenological and social psychological paradigm, that authenticity as professors experience it, “is a complex and often ambivalent emotional experience” (Vannini, 2006, pp.253-254).

Vannini (2006) suggests that while there has been significant research and literature “on the structural organization of academia…ethnographic studies of professors’ work and lives are rare” (p. 241). While his study is important for its discussions of the phenomenon of publish or perish, it is Vannini’s (2006) ability to weave into his research the tensions experienced by faculty regarding the pressure of “get grants or perish” (p.241). Thus, it is this discussion on this increasing experience that becomes paramount to current research in higher education. Although his study provided limited focus of how
these pressures are experienced by the forty-six faculty members who were interviewed for his study, Vannini (2006) asserts,

Simply put, “publish or perish” shapes professors’ work by directing their energy toward conducting research and publishing great volumes. At a research university if a professor fails to publish he/she will perish professionally… “Get grants or perish” is a somewhat newer institutional force. Professors have always needed to seek grants (especially in the natural sciences), but over the last twenty-five years state budget crisis have promoted state legislators to cut Mountain State’s budget year after year, thus pushing university administrators to pressure their faculty into raising funds for the university (p. 241).

Another discussion that is intriguing is that which Vannini (2006) terms the ‘origins of inauthenticity’ whereby Vannini questions the transformation of the student to that of consumer and the increasing demands of an education that provides an ‘end to a means’ for employment. However, as many governments and businesses impart these pressures on students, the pressures placed on faculty members and administrators also become invaluable to research on the neoliberal rationality and accountability in higher education.

**Chapter Summary**

The literature consulted highlighted the increasing influence of performativity and accountability; the rise of neoliberalism and the global culture of comparison; quality assurance and the role of international organizations; faculty autonomy and creativity; and lastly the phenomenon of publish or perish. The literature also begins to touch on the potential risks that this present global field of education holds with regard to power, ethics, citizenry, democracy and higher education itself.

Thus, the significance of this literature review, as noted in my introduction, is three-fold: Firstly, there has not been a qualitative study of how quality assurance policy,
used as a mechanism for accountability, is changing the professional work experiences of faculty members and administrators in higher education, in Ontario, Canada. Second, while quality assurance policies are important, the manner for which ‘quality’ has been assessed and analyzed brings to the fore an important point made by Lingard and Lewis (2016) and this is the difference between “assessment as and for learning” versus “assessment of learning” (p. 23). This holds special implication in the wake of the newly implemented Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) in Ontario, Canada that introduces higher education in this province to Performance Based Funding (PBF).

As noted in the introduction to this research, perhaps, most importantly what the literature consulted revealed is the existing gap in higher education research with regard to the neoliberal rationality that informs what teaching, researching, managing and higher education itself is to mean and be valued as in the 21st Century. When writing of the new measures of ‘what counts’ in higher education: efficiency and accountability, Berg and Seeber (2016) eloquently state, “[b]eing ethical may actually mean being inefficient at times. It’s another risk worth taking” (p. 60). Maurizio Lazzarato (2009) in his study on the authority of neoliberalism as a “key apparatus” (p.109) in transforming society argues, “neoliberalism has transformed society into an, ‘enterprise society’ based on the market, competition, inequality, and the privilege of the individual” (p. 109). Thus, when contemplating neoliberalism here in the global North or in the South it is essential to remember, “at every stage of history our concern must be to dismantle those forms of authority and oppression that survive from an era when they might have been justified in terms of the need for security or economic development, but that now contribute to—rather than alleviate- material and cultural deficit” (Chomsky, 2008, p. 93).
Chapter 3:

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter focuses on methodological approaches and methods employed in order to respond to critical questions regarding quality assurance and accountability policies in higher education. As such my research design used the qualitative case study as conceptualized by Stake (1995, 2004, 2005), Yin (2003, 2009) and Patton (2015). Thus, there was a constant interplay between both my theoretical and methodological framework as each informed my data collection, analysis and reporting. This is revealed at the onset by my research questions, the theoretical framework employed, my critical engagement with the literature reviewed, my use of purposeful sampling and the use of semi-structured interview questions that assisted in the overall development of rich data that did not generalize my findings but rather made particular the personal experiences of those interviewed so to bring a deeper understanding to their experiences of quality assurance policy and accountability in higher education.

Lastly, my position within the critical framework is made clear through the purpose of this study, which was to conduct a critical analysis of neoliberal reform in higher education by investigating the changing experiences of faculty members and administrators. In Jean Anyon’s (2009) work on critical social theory, Greg Dimitriadis (2009) speaks to the significance and timeliness of the interplay between theory and method in research when he writes, “Anyon has shown by example what can happen when social theory is brought into authentic dialogue with empirical material. Data, to echo her introduction, are lifted off the ground. Data soar. Data sing. Such work inspires
us to look at our world differently, to see our empirical projects as part of a rigorous and critical ongoing dialogue with others” (pp. vii-iii).

**Policy Sociology: Theory as Methodology**

Policy sociology (Ozga, 1987), as theory and methodology was the prime lens through which the professional experiences of both faculty members and administrators in higher education are explored in this study. Policy sociology is a diverse concept as it allows the researcher to investigate structures of power (macro and micro), theoretically and methodologically. As noted earlier in this study, policy sociology grew in response to a gap in educational research leading up to the 1980s. Concerned by the increasing dominance of the traditionalist approach to policy analysis in the social sciences, one that re-enforced both the theoretical and methodological divides of the macro/micro and lacked criticality; policy sociology sought a different approach (Ozga, 1987). Ozga (1987) elaborates,

> [T]he depth of division, the dominance of applied educational management studies, the neglect of historical work and the tendency of educational sociology to restrict itself to macro-level and relatively abstract theorizing...For this reason the time is ripe for the development of policy sociology, rooted in the social science tradition, historically informed and drawing on qualitative and illuminative techniques (p.144).

Thus, the foundation of policy sociology is built on the recognition of the social historical context that reminds us that people are more than objects of research. More recently policy sociology has been implemented to highlight the multi-scalar effects of neoliberal globalization in what has come to be regarded as Ball’s ‘policy trilogy’: Policy production, policy context and policy practice. Rizvi and Lingard (2010), in the tradition of policy sociology argue, “Given our acceptance of a definition of policy as the
authoritative allocation of values, we would suggest that in reality evidence (research- and practice- based) can only ever be one contributing factor to policy development in education” (p.49). Thus, as stated earlier policy sociology has many projects as it not only reveals sites of power but can also point to sites for resistance and re-imagining educational policy and research (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). Policy sociology emphasizes the need for the continued dialogue between that of theory and methodology. In 2019 Ozga revisits the origins of policy sociology while creating a focus on its evolution, as both theory and methodology, and what is now referred to as ‘critical policy sociology’ (CPS). When discussing the distinction of CPS as theory and that of methodology Ozga states, “the theoretical resources of that CPS draws upon reflect theory’s obligation and capacity to explain, while methodology offers approaches to investigation of a topic” (2019, p. 7). Ozga (2019) argues,

This is, in practice, a far more absolute distinction, but reflects the prioritisation of theory, as key to shaping the domain that is being studied. The critical element in CPS indicates a form of alertness, a determination to judge, evaluate and analyse one’s own ideas and those of others, but openly and carefully, allowing for a wide range of approaches, enabling what Ball calls ‘edifying conversations’ that support intellectually-based social criticism (p.7).

Rizvi and Lingard (2010), when considering the relationship between policy sociology as theory and methodology, also speak to the critical importance of researcher positionality and reflexivity. The significance of researcher positionality is that it “has implications for the nature of the analysis done and the theoretical and methodological options available” (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, p.48); furthermore, reflexivity is layered, as it “demands transparent articulation of researcher positionality and the significance of this to data collection and analysis” (p.48). Thus, Ozga suggests that reflexivity as understood
within the domain of sociology “is the obligation to examine and understand the production of knowledge, to interrogate one’s own assumptions, to examine the effects of theory on evidence, and to examine the effects on the researcher her or himself” (2019, p.11).

**Qualitative Case Study Research**

The qualitative study is about meaning; it is personal. Drawing from Loevinger (1976) Patton (2015) suggests, “What makes us different from other animals is our capacity to assign meaning to things. The essence of being human is integrating and making sense of experience” (Patton, 2015, p.3). Therefore, the researcher of a qualitative study becomes the agent for investigating and interpreting how the meaning of an individual or group toward a specific phenomenon is constructed and experienced (Patton, 2015). Thus, the analysis, and quality of analysis, of a qualitative study is largely dependent on the interpretation of how meaning is constructed and experienced. This interpretation is created through a variety of methods that collect data using literature review, document analysis, interviews and observation (Patton, 2015).

The researcher of a qualitative study, then, is critically and reflexively cognizant of their situatedness, for the quality of qualitative studies is inextricably connected with the level of theoretical and methodological knowledge of the researcher, the degree of sensitivity that the researcher possesses, the ethical consideration of the researcher and the researcher’s own positionality (Patton, 2015). In sum, qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest is, “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world” (p.3).
There are a variety of methods that can be employed when conducting a qualitative study however, for the purpose of this research as stated earlier, I employed the method of case study research as conceptualized by Stake (1995, 2005), Yin (2003, 2009) and Patton (2015). Stake (2005) when discussing case study research suggests “Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (p.443). Further Stake (2005) adds that those who employ the case study research method understand that the focus of the case study is on the lived experience of the subject of your research with a detailed focus of the historical, cultural, political and economic context which shapes that experience, thus safeguarding that the case being studied is done by using multiple optics (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Case study research complements my theoretical framework of policy sociology and neoliberal globalization for while the broad consideration of this study is that of quality assurance policy and accountability in higher education, the deeper analysis (the case) was on the lived professional experiences of faculty members and administrators who interpret, translate and practice these policies.

Case study research, as a method in the social sciences, is founded on the constructivist paradigm, which posits,

One of the advantages of this approach is the close collaboration between researcher and the participant, while enabling participants to tell their stories (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Through these stories the participants are able to describe their views of reality and this enables the researcher to better understand the participants’ actions (Lather, 1992; Robottman & Hart, 1993 in Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 545).

Yin (2009) when discussing case study research elaborates, “[i]n general, case studies are the preferred method when (a) “how” or “why” questions are being posed, (b) the
investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within real life context” (p.2). Further Yin (2009) asserts, “the distinctive need for case studies arises out of a desire to understand complex social phenomena. In brief, the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p.4). Thus, once more, qualitative case study research is ideally suited not only to the purpose of my research but is also compatible with the theoretical concepts that shaped and informed my study.

The Case

As noted above, case study research complements my theoretical framework of policy sociology and neoliberal globalization for while the broad consideration of my study is that of quality assurance policy and accountability in higher education, the deeper analysis (the case) will be that of the lived experiences of faculty members and administration who interpret, translate and practice these policies. While both Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) are two of the more prominent scholars to draw from when adopting case study research, each have a separate and distinct approach. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to draw primarily from the case study research as conceptualized by Stake (1995, 2004, 2005), as I find it provides a greater fit between my theoretical framework, my methodological design and purpose of this study. For while Yin “uses propositions to guide the research process, Stake (1995) applies “issues”” (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 552). The significance of this difference is that “[i]ssues are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical and especially personal contexts” (Stake, 1995, p.17).
When discussing case study as method, Stake (1995) shares there are three different approaches that can be considered after the case is determined and these are: the *intrinsic* case, the *instrumental* case and the *collective* case. Briefly, the intrinsic case is employed when the researcher is “interested in it [the case], not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case” (Stake, 1995, p.3). The instrumental case study is employed when the researcher seeks to understand something other than the case, “[i]t provides insight into an issue or helps to refine a theory” (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 549). As the name implies, the collective case study is employed when the researcher chooses to study multiple cases. Thus, for the purpose of my research I have chosen to employ the instrumental case study method as it assisted in providing insight into how quality assurance policies, acting as measures for accountability, are organizing and shaping faculty members and administrators’ experiences role in higher education during an era of neoliberal globalization.

**Data Collection**

Halcolm discussing qualitative research suggests, “Since you can’t study everything and everyone, focus on something important and someone from whom you can learn a great deal about that matter of importance. Choose wisely, with purpose. Time is fleeting. Pay attention” (Halcolm in Patton, 2015, p.52). Thus, a purposeful sampling of 9 participants, each faculty members and administrators, from universities located in Ontario, Canada was employed. Purposeful sampling, as a method, in qualitative case study research is formidable as it stresses the breadth and depth of information generated through specific, “*information-rich cases*. Information-rich cases are those one can learn a great deal about
issues of central importance to the purpose of the research; thus the term *purposeful sampling*” (Patton, 2015, p. 52, original emphases). The overall design of my data collection, therefore, was an analysis of existing literature and policy documents, purposeful sampling, semi-structured interviews that were digitally recorded and notes containing observations and interpretations from each interview.

**Participants**

As I selected the method of purposeful sampling each of the participants chosen for this study were required to be from the following field: Education, Social Science, Humanities or Liberal Arts for as noted by Hall (2011b) and Brown (2015) each of these fields are in crisis due to the neoliberal rationality. Each interviewee invited to participate in this study was contacted via their professional email address found on their university department website. Each emailed invitation to participate in this study contained general information as to the purpose of this study and the contact information of the principal investigator. Upon acceptance of this invitation to participate, a letter of information was provided to each participant that detailed the purpose of the study, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and study procedures, which informed each that they were being asked to participate in a sixty minute long semi-structured interview. Although a few interviews went longer than the sixty minutes, each was digitally recorded and the interview itself took place at a mutually agreed on location.

The letter of information also informed each interviewee that there were no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. The participants were informed that while there would be no direct benefit for participation, the information collected for this study would provide benefits to society, as the intention
of this research is to explore neoliberalism as a form of rationality in higher education and how this has been transforming the experiences of faculty members and administrators. The participants of this study were also informed about anonymity and confidentiality and that pseudonyms would be used.

In the end, six faculty members and three senior administrators from different universities located in Ontario, Canada consented to participate in this study. Below each interviewee is introduced, using pseudonyms, while providing their roles and the number of years of experience in higher education:

**Table 1: The Interview Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position in Higher Education</th>
<th>Years of Experience in Higher Education</th>
<th>Professional Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>Full Professor</td>
<td>Over 15</td>
<td>Associate lecturer, Lecturer, Researcher, Curriculum specialist, Associate Professor, Program Chair, Full Professor, Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessie</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Over 10</td>
<td>Consultant, Policy analyst, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Department Director, Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>Full Professor</td>
<td>Over 35</td>
<td>Professor, Researcher, Mentor, Innovator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>Over 25</td>
<td>Instructor, Lecturer, Curriculum designer, Researcher, Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>Full Professor</td>
<td>Over 20</td>
<td>Researcher, consultant, policy analyst, curriculum specialist, policy advisor, Full professor, Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabeau</td>
<td>Full Professor</td>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>Researcher, Curriculum designer, Full Professor, Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Senior Administrator</td>
<td>Over 25</td>
<td>Researcher, Chair, Senior Administrator, Senior Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Senior Administrator</td>
<td>Over 20</td>
<td>Director, Principal, Vice President, Senior Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa</td>
<td>Senior Administrator</td>
<td>Over 25</td>
<td>Researcher, Professor, Senate Committee Chair, Senior Administrator, Mentor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, a consent form was included in each interviewee’s ‘Letter of Information’, which included the project title and, once again the name and contact information of the principal investigator that each participant was required to sign at the start of the interview process. All data from each interview, including digital recordings, transcriptions, and notes are stored in a locked box and only accessible to the investigators of this research.

**Semi – Structured Interviews & the Qualitative Approach**

The significance of the qualitative approach is its capacity “to capture how those being interviewed view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences” (Patton, 2002, p. 348).
Thus, qualitative interviews provide the interviewer and the interviewee with considerable autonomy. Semi-structured interviews are of value to this research as they provided interview consistency, utilized limited resources such as time, and provided validity through their comparative features during the data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Stake (1995) when discussing data analysis in case study research states, “[t]here is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final completions. Analysis essentially means taking something apart” (p. 71). The wonder of qualitative case study research analysis is its ability to bring to life the everyday manner for which we make meaning. Once again, borrowing from Stake (1995), “[a]t first we don’t recognize them, then with surprising suddenness the face fits into a pattern that we do recognize. We wonder why we did not recognize them in the first place” (p. 72).

Once all data collection had been transcribed and read several times, coding and a synthesis of the data informed through my theoretical framework began. This is a complex and involved process in qualitative case study research, one that translated my raw data into findings (Patton, 2015). When discussing qualitative analysis Patton (2015) asserts, “[i]n analyzing qualitative data, guidelines exist but no recipes; principles provide direction” (p. 521). It is at this point, in the research process that the distinction between the qualitative and quantitative approaches became most evident as the process of qualitative analysis becomes solely dependent on the “skill, knowledge, creativity, diligence and work” of the researcher (Patton, 2015, p.521). Thus, no formulaic recipe exists for case study research. However, one principle that does assist the case study
approach to qualitative research and analysis is that it does require a great level of synthesis between rich data and the theoretical concepts employed (Patton, 2015).

Therefore, following each interview the transcribing process began, which I completed personally. The coding process consisted of multiple revisits to each transcript, reading, and re-reading, whereby each reading provided me with the opportunity to highlight, underline, and circle significant experiences and language used. I also reflectively and critically added my own thoughts and questions with regard to interpretations during the transcribing process. Thus, an analysis of the literature reviewed, policy documentation and interviews conducted with both faculty members and administrators in higher education shaped and informed my research.

Case study research acknowledges, “no observation or interpretation is repeatable” (Stake, 2005, p. 454). Therefore, the synthesis of data collected assisted my research in “clarify[ing] meaning by identifying different ways the case can be seen” (Stake, 2005, p.454); thus, once again, the significance of theory informing data and data informing theory (Ball et al., 2012). However, as Patton (2002) reminds us when conducting case study research, “no way exists of perfectly replicating the researcher’s analytical process. No straightforward tests can be applied for reliability and validity” (p.433) as each individual interview is as unique to the study as the analysis employed in each investigation.

**Strengths and Limitations**

Case study research as a method is not without critique and Yin (2009) suggests that possibly the most popular criticism is “over lack of rigor” (p.14). However, Stake (2005) challenges this critique when he asserts, “Good case study research follows disciplined
practices of analysis and triangulation to tease out what deserves to be called experiential knowledge from what is opinion and preference” (Stake, 2004 in Stake 2005, p.455).

Thus, what is paramount to qualitative case study research is not generalizabilty, but what is particular (Stake, 1995, 2004, 2005; Yin, 2003, 2009; Patton, 2015). The strength of employing policy sociology/CPS as both theory and methodology is its abiding relationship with societal concerns such as education, higher education, equity and power.

**Chapter Summary**

Qualitative case study research informed through policy sociology/CPS were my chosen method and methodology for this study as it creates the possibility to illuminate complex issues regarding the neoliberal rationality for quality assurance and accountability in higher education through multiple sources. This allowed my research to investigate, explore and share the experiential knowledge of those involved as to ‘how’ and ‘why’ quality assurance policies, as measures for accountability, are organizing and shaping the experiences of faculty members and administrators in higher education. Thus, purposeful sampling took place using semi-structured interviews. Following each interview, the coding process took place involving multiple readings, re-readings and the continuous interplay between theory and data, which then led to the unfolding and informing of the research findings. However, before moving on to my research findings, which will be presented in chapter’s five and six of this study, the following chapter will be focused on the policy analysis of the Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) in Ontario, quality assurance, accountability and performance based funding in higher education.
Chapter 4:

Quality Assurance, Accountability & Performance Based Funding

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature in this study on quality assurance and accountability that also creates an analysis of the new, and evolving, Performance Based Funding (PBF) model for universities and colleges in Ontario, Canada known as the Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA). The concept of the SMA proposed in 2012 under the then Liberal provincial government is an agreement between 45 universities and colleges in Ontario. The SMA begins with a discussion paper, titled Strengthening Ontario’s Centres of Creativity, Innovation and Knowledge: A discussion paper to make our university and college system stronger (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2012). The paper calls for the reformation for the modern university based on economic needs and greater public accountability so to protect public funding of higher education (MTCU 2012). The paper also briefly introduces the concept of PBF for higher education. In the paper the Ministry asserts, “As demonstrated in Budget 2012, PSE [Post Secondary Education] continues to be one of the government’s highest priorities” (MTCU 2012, p.6). Further to this the document states, “Online learning, experiential learning, and the acceleration of knowledge creation and transfer are driving a major shift in our PSE education system” (MTCU 2012, p.6).

Strengthening Ontario’s Centres of Creativity, Innovation and Knowledge (2012), as a policy document, raises many interesting questions and proposals for changes in
higher education in Ontario, questions such as quality assurance, accountability, 
credential options and supplements, credit transfer, and the role of the Bologna Process 
(BP) discussed below. However, several of the proposals become specifically significant 
to the economic shaping of the SMA and these are: Year–round programming, Quality 
teaching and learning outcomes, increasing use of the Collegiate Learning Assessment 
(CLA) or other similar standardized measures of assessment, and experiential and 
entrepreneurial learning.

**Quality Assurance & Accountability of Higher Education in Ontario**

Stated earlier, quality assurance and accountability of higher education is not only a 
Canadian consideration. External quality assurance protocols are widely used in higher 
education by most nations, including Canada, and increasingly so over the course of the 
past four decades. While most agree with the importance of quality assurance in 
education and higher education, its present widespread use has become synonymous with 
top-down methods for accountability and is posited to be an important part of economic 
development and the internationalization of higher education (Lingard et al., 2016; 
TEQSA, 2012b; HEQCO, 2010). Thus, considerable research continues regarding how 
‘quality’ should be defined, how quality is to be achieved, and what measures to use that 
could best demonstrate ‘quality’ within the context of higher education (Ontario 
Universities Council on Quality Assurance (QC), 2010; ENQA, 2005; HEQCO, 2010; 
HEQCO, 2015).

An increasing area of higher education research involves demonstrating quality 
through outcomes, often defined as graduation rates and employment rates upon 
graduation (Skolnik, 2010). With greater emphasis on the internationalization of higher
education, many nations now have in place organizations to externally assess and advise on standards for quality assurance in higher education believing that such organizations afford a degree of non-partisanship when researching and providing such recommendations for reforms to government ministries and universities alike (HEQCO, 2010). It is specifically to the discourse on the quality of higher education that Weingarten and Deller (2010) argue that for Ontario to improve its level of quality in higher education that policies regarding differentiation between universities must be implemented and that universities themselves should be held fiscally accountable for that level of quality as demonstrated through the commodification of research and the employability of its graduates. Thus, Weingarten and Deller (2010) suggest that the university should not view the idea of differentiation as constraining. Rather, the two authors posit that differentiation ought to be viewed as a method which “promotes institutional quality and system competitiveness” among other characteristics such as accountability” and “sustainability” (Weingarten and Deller, 2010, p.10).

Ontario policy higher education documents on quality through diversity between institutions reflect elements of the Bologna Process, but also suggest elements promoted by Weingarten and Deller (2010). However, Weingarten and Deller’s (2010) recommendations regarding differentiation as a method “to promote institutional quality and system competitiveness” (p. 10) do not mirror the understanding put forth by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which is “characterized by its diversity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, aspirations, and expectations (ENQA, 2005).
In a publication by *University Affairs* (2017) a discussion takes place that questions the challenges of institutional diversity that arise in higher education when teaching and research become separate activities from each other and the implications of this form of diversification on the quality of learning in higher education (Riddell, 2017). Also, of importance to the discourse on quality assurance in higher education is how it is defined. This is noted earlier by the complex description of quality assurance and accountability policy in higher education as noted by Weingarten when he speaks to this complexity in his blog for the HEQCO, *It’s Not Academic* (2017).

Discussing the importance of quality assurance, the QC (2010) states that in Ontario there is an established history of quality assurance in higher education; sharing that in Ontario strict external methods of measuring the quality of undergraduate programs in higher education can be traced back to 1968. The Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS) began external assessments in 1982 of all graduate programs (QC, 2010). These quality assessments were historically based on the following criteria: Access (number of students attending), number of students graduating, and employment within 6 months and two years after graduating. Thus, it is suggested that Ontario be viewed as an innovator with regard to quality assurance in higher education (QC, 2010). Therefore, it is also suggested that higher education and access to quality higher education matters to this province (Rae, 2005).

Yet, while higher education in Ontario and quality assurance policies have a tradition in this province, it would appear that Ontario, for the moment, is still exploring how quality assurance could be defined and how global methods such as the Bologna Process (BP) and the newly created, yet paused, OECD project the “Assessment of
Higher Education Learning Outcomes” (2012) might be adopted within the Canadian higher education policy context (Lennon and Jonker, 2014; Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2008a). In a report released by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2008a), the following is stated,

While the impact of the Bologna Process on the Canadian higher education landscape has been limited to date, it is quite likely to become the yardstick against which other higher education systems will be compared internationally. The issue of comparison benchmarks will only grow in importance with the internationalization of student recruitment and increased labour force mobility (p.7).

Thus, Shanahan (2009) when researching changes to higher education suggests, “economic principles of productivity, efficiency and competitiveness have become imperatives. And we have seen our accountability frameworks become infused with market discourse, market principles and market mechanisms” (p.3). This speaks directly to the common sense discourse on higher education policy in Ontario and the decreasing public funding of higher education, which is posited to be “a political response to the challenges and opportunities which arise from the decomposition of Fordism and the economic and extra economic tendencies of globalisation” (Jessop 2002, p.124 in Ball, Goodson, and Maguire, 2007, p. X).

A report published by University World News (2019), states that to become both accountable and transparent in the investment of higher education in the province of Ontario, the now present Conservative government suggests it will do so through transforming its public funding of higher education, which will be based on performance based funding. This then leads to the following section, which will elaborate on the context of the ascending market discourse of higher education in Ontario, Canada, the
genesis of the Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) between 21 of Ontario’s public universities, and the newly transformed performance based funding (PBF) model.

**Strengthening Ontario’s Centres for Creativity, Innovation and Knowledge: The Birth of PBF & the SMA in Ontario**

The Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) between 21 of Ontario’s public universities were built as a result of the discussion paper published by the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities in 2012. The Strategic Mandate Agreement builds on the questions and proposals brought forward in the paper (2012) that present Ontario’s higher education sector as in need of change that will respond to the challenges of the modern university, while also responding to a need to satisfy global economies and public accountability that the MTCU (2012) suggest will be driven by Performance Based Funding (PBF).

The unrolling of the Strategic Mandate Agreement begins more fully within the policy document, *Ontario’s Differentiation Policy Framework of Postsecondary Education* (MTCU, 2013), which argues, “We [the province of Ontario] need to make changes to protect the gains of the last ten years, and to ensure that Ontario’s postsecondary education continues to enjoy a productive and promising future” (p.5).

However, an analysis of the original discussion paper by the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities (2012), along with *Ontario’s Differentiation Policy Framework* (MTCU, 2013) and other policy documents, reveals the thinning vision of quality assurance and accountability in universities that is taking place in Ontario by the Ministry through the Strategic Mandate Agreement.
The discussion paper begins by sharing that “Postsecondary education (PSE) systems around the world are rapidly transforming in response to evolving economic, social, and student learning realities” (MTCU, 2012, p.4). Furthermore, the document states that an ever-growing diverse student population in higher education demands greater means for demonstrating quality assurance, along with greater accountability, for the investment that they as the public and government make to higher education. The Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities (MTCU, 2012) argues that due to the growing demand to have a more highly educated labour force, the Ontario government is placed in the position of addressing the growing challenges of increasing access to higher education. The Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities also shares that modernizing higher education in Ontario will be achieved by taking its lead from the “K-12 school system that has been acknowledged as the best in the English-speaking world” (2012, p. 5) stating, that in doing so, “we have a way to modernize our post secondary system in a way that will make it more relevant, more flexible, and more beneficial to Ontario students” (MTCU, 2012, p.5).

In 2012, the then provincial Liberal government made a series of changes in the province’s commitment to improving access to higher education. These changes include some of the following: providing access to an additional 60,000 qualified learners; providing a 30 per cent reduction in Ontario Tuition Grants for students from middle income families; the establishment of an Ontario Access Grant for students from low income families that provides 50 per cent in tuition grants; providing greater support for “our young entrepreneurs”; while also seeking to provide “the conditions to reach a 70 per cent attainment rate among Ontario’s adult population” (MTCU, 2012, p.6). Thus, the
MTCU (2012) suggests that as a result of the province’s commitment in making higher education a significant priority, the province of Ontario experiences the highest number of students attending higher education. However, the province of Ontario is also the most populated province in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2019).

Ontario’s objective for higher education, in the MTCU (2012) report, is to “drive creativity, innovation, knowledge and community engagement through teaching and research” (p.7) as it is Ontario’s position that it will be through the promotion of innovation in higher education that opportunities for the quality of student learning will be achieved; an achievement that will generate provincial economic strength. However, the discussion paper also states that as a result of the 2008 recession that the province of Ontario is obligated to guide the publicly funded higher education sector towards greater fiscal responsibility stating, “The government will lead its publicly funded postsecondary institutions towards lower rates of spending growth and higher levels of productivity through innovation” (MTCU, 2012, p. 8). This leaves the Ministry to argue the benefit of an innovation-based approach to funding of higher education that looks to move some courses online, versus that of an efficiency-based approach that looks at increasing class sizes.

The Ministry document (2012) discusses a number of proposals in their quest for the modernizing of higher education in Ontario, while seeking to make improvements to quality assurance and accountability. The first proposal begins with the management of pension plans within higher education. Regarding the future of pension plans within the higher education sector, the MTCU (2012) states, that “The government expects all broader public sector (BPS) partners to bargain responsibly and to consider aspects of
collective agreements that enhance productivity and facilitate transformation” (p.9). The paper then goes on to say that in light of the many challenges faced by higher education, challenges that are due to the acceleration of learning and the pressures of learning and teaching, that the significance of critical engagement and “wisdom” continue to be paramount (MTCU, 2012, p. 9).

The Ministry document (MTCU, 2012) also provides a list of proposed methods for modernizing learning within higher education, each of which once again posits the improvement of quality assurance and accountability. The first proposal with regard to learning discusses the rise of technology-based learning, stating how technology-based learning does more than accelerate access to information, that it promotes new opportunities for student engagement, suggesting that “rather than faculty “transmitting” lecture data to students sitting in a hall, digital delivery of course content can free faculty in traditional institutions to engage in direct dialogue and mentorship with students” (MTCU, 2012, p.10). While in the eye of the storm of the global pandemic, COVID-19, future research regarding online learning will become of great relevance.

The discussion paper produced by the Ministry (2012) also recommends high quality out-come based credentials through the adaptation of the Bologna Declaration (1999). However, the Bologna Declaration was established as a method to harmonize higher education across the continent of Europe, so to enhance student and labour mobility by, in part, mandating a three-year undergraduate degree. The OCUFA (2012) suggests that while the Bologna Process presents an intriguing plan for the European Higher Education Area, that Canada must remain cautious when borrowing education
policies that were designed to address a variety of higher educational challenges that are not relevant to the Canadian context. The following quote captures this concern,

> We cannot wander at pleasure among educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower from one bush and some leaves from another, and expect that if we stick what we have gathered in the soil at home, we shall have a live plant (Sir Michael Saddler as quoted in Hayhoe & Mundy, 2008, p.6 in OCUFA, 2013, p.5).

Thus, in aiming to adopt the Bologna Declaration, in the context of higher education in Ontario, Canada, viewing the Bologna Declaration as an ideal for change without critically engaging is both misguided and places in jeopardy the pursuit of improving the quality of higher education in this province (OCUFA, 2013).

Further, to adopting the Bologna Declaration, the Ministry suggests an improvement to the mobility of credentials between different institutions of higher education arguing that a student should be able to take their courses at a variety of different institutions, as this will foster greater knowledge mobilization (MTCU, 2012). However, this recommendation does not make clear how funding by the government to each individual institution, based on individual performance, can be awarded. Next the paper (2012) posits the importance of experiential learning along with the development of entrepreneurial skills, stating “Globally, there has been tremendous growth in entrepreneurial education. Some of these opportunities already exist in Ontario including the Ryerson University Digital Media Zone, [and] the University of Waterloo VeloCity Program/Residence” (p.12), among other institutions of higher education mentioned. The financial success of such programs then becomes the catalyst for the concept of performance based funding proffered by the MTCU (2012), regardless of program type,
which holds special concern for programs that are not technologically or entrepreneurially driven.

However, it is the Ministry’s (2012) suggestion that by transforming the university through the provision of more online courses and innovation-based funding that an occasion will present itself to restructure public funding of higher education. It is here, then, that the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities introduces, briefly, the concept of performance based funding for higher education in Ontario when they state, “Funding options could be provided on a performance basis (e.g., number of firms created, number of angel investments in student companies, number of new jobs)” (2012, p.12), once again, leaving areas of study that do not fit within this narrow concept of quality and accountability in jeopardy of being eliminated from universities.

The Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities discussion paper also states a need for “new data and accountability” (p.13), so to drive innovation in the higher education sector. More specifically the paper asserts,

If the postsecondary sector is being charged with improving productivity through innovation, it is important to understand where our institutions stand and how well they are progressing towards achieving the vision and goals that have been set for the sector. Ensuring that there is accountability for the quality of teaching and learning as well as for the quality of research that occurs in our postsecondary institutions is critical (2012, p.13).

It is here that the Ministry (2012), taking advice based on research conducted by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), argues the need for greater measures of standardization in higher education to properly assess the “formal learning outcomes- the skills and competencies that institutions develop in their graduates” (p.13). The Ministry (2012), citing projects such as the “Assessment of Higher Education
Learning Outcomes”, the “Collegiate Learning Assessment”, and the European “Tuning Project” suggest that each leads to the establishment of “what students should know and be able to do within a specific discipline in an effort to promote mobility, credit transfer, and credential recognition” (MTCU, 2012, p. 13). Interestingly this document fails to make mention that in Ontario all publicly funded colleges and universities have agreements to support the transferring of earned credits. To facilitate credential transfer the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT), established in 2011, has created an easily accessible online resource, whereby “there are currently over 1,900 credit transfer pathways available in Ontario, and more than 800,000 distinct transfer opportunities” (ONCAT, 2020). The Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities (2012) paper then leads to the development of a response paper issued by the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) in 2012.

Growing Ontario’s Universities for the Future: OCUFA’s Response to Strengthening Ontario’s Centres of Creativity, Innovation and Knowledge

Although the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities, in their discussion paper (2012), promised to provide greater transparency for quality assurance and accountability within higher education, critics of performance based funding fear the opposite to be true. When analyzing the discussion paper (MTCU, 2012), for which the Strategic Mandate Agreement is built on, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) notes not only a lack of transparency within the discussion paper, but also a lack of informed thought, as to what the challenges and the purpose of a university education are to mean to the public good and government alike.
The OCUFA (2012) response specifically addresses the fact that the discussion paper not only illustrates definitional issues, but that the paper also inadequately makes understandable what the challenges are in higher education and how the suggested reforms will address these. This leaves OCUFA (2013) to argue, how this vagueness undermines any genuine discussion on quality assurance and accountability in higher education (2012). The closest to a clear goal, or an objective, set by the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities (2012) in their discussion paper is a section dedicated to “A Vision for Ontario’s Postsecondary Sector” (p. 6), whereby the MTCU states that it is the government’s vision that,

> Ontario’s colleges and universities will drive creativity, innovation, knowledge and community engagement through teaching and research. They will put students first by providing the best possible learning experiences for all qualified learners in an affordable and financially sustainable way, ensuring high quality, and globally competitive outcomes for students and Ontario’s creative economy (2012, p.7).

Analysing the above statement the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (2012) offer the following critique, with respect to the proposals made by the Ministry (2012) in their discussion paper regarding innovation, putting students first, and productivity suggesting that while the discussion paper fails to clearly define the challenges, the paper also clearly fails in an understanding of what it means by innovation, putting students first, and productivity within the context of a university.

Regarding innovation OCUFA (2012) counters with the following,

> Generally, innovation occurs in response to a specific problem or challenge. It does not happen for its own sake. Innovation is seldom a top-down process; it occurs due to grassroots collaboration and leadership. It is rare that somebody innovates because they were told to. The discussion paper does not appear to recognize these realities, and consequently its
approach to “innovation” is somewhat distorted. A government mandated labour-market credential is not innovative. A new credential designed by an institution to meet the needs of its students and communities is (p. 8).

The next point that the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations articulately counters is the concept of quality education and placing all ‘qualified students first’. The OCUFA (2012) argues that in order to provide quality education that provides greater access for all qualified learners that greater public support through government public funding is required. In the 2012 document the Ministry asserts that public universities are of the highest importance to the province for fostering innovation. The Ministry document also states, “Costs in the postsecondary sector have grown at a rate above inflation during a time when growth and grants from government have become constrained” (p.8), creating a disconnection regarding higher education being most important to the province and declining provincial fiscal support.

When commenting on the proposals made by the MTCU (2012), that of the importance of placing students “first by providing the best possible learning experiences for all qualified learners” (p.7) and that of providing higher education in “an affordable and financially sustainable way, ensuring high quality and globally competitive outcomes for students and Ontario’s creative economy” (p.7) OCUFA (2012) counters, citing that the quality of learning comes through greater government support of smaller class sizes where professors and students have access to one-on-one time within the classroom. Thus, OCUFA (2012) argues that ensuring financial sustainability comes from greater public support and not the increase in student tuitions, and that globally competitive outcomes that foster creativity do not occur through ‘funds for performance’ but rather ‘funds for success’.
Speaking specifically of productivity in the university sector in Ontario, and the Ministry’s (2012) suggestion that productivity in the university could be improved, OCUFA (2012) suggests the following,

As for productivity, the [university] sector has made remarkable gains over the past decade. The average professor now teaches 22 percent more students than they did in 2000. Ontario university operating costs per student are also 13 percent lower than the Canadian average, and faculty salaries are 18 percent below the rest of Canada. We also have the highest student-to-faculty ratio (28:1), which implies that Ontario’s professors are educating more students than anywhere else in the country. We are educating more students with fewer resources than most jurisdictions in Canada- a textbook example of enhanced productivity (pp. 8-9).

An important objective of this study is to share how deeply neoliberal values have become embedded in the university, blurring the ideals of what quality assurance and accountability mean in the university today. Writing of neoliberalism and the ideals of democracy in education, Portelli and Konecny (2013) explain that ideals are,

[T]hat toward which one strives, not fixed end points or destinations to be reached…The meaning of an ideal resides in the imperfect attempts, to make idealized principles a worldly reality-attempts that, with each repetition and revision, bring the world in which human beings live closer and closer to an unreachable perfection. Striving toward an ideal, while never attainable, makes the world in which that striving takes place better (p.93).

In 2013 the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities promoted that central to the goal of quality assurance and accountability in the modern university, is the requirement to ensure both, which will require a “balancing act between government stewardship, and institutional leadership, and a strengthening of transparency and accountability between the government, institutions, and the public” (p.5). Ivan Illich (1970) concerned with the rise of government in stewarding the goals of education.
forewarns of the dissolution of education, which he suggests will occur beyond a shadow of a doubt. This then leads to an analysis of the proposals put forward in the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities document entitled *Ontario’s Differentiation Policy Framework* (2013).

**Ontario’s Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education**

In Ontario, we have witnessed a significant change in higher education as recent provincial government policies on differentiation and performance based funding create the groundwork for transforming the university through the Strategic Mandate Agreement, thus adjusting funding for higher education to align with government views and preferences (2013). The policy document, *Ontario’s Differentiation Policy Framework for Postsecondary Education*, issued by the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities in November 2013, provides several government priorities and metrics that begin to concretely build the text and discourse of the current ten metrics found within the Strategic Mandate Agreement under the current Conservative provincial government.

In the policy document of November 2013, the Ministry promotes, as noted above, that central to the goal of quality assurance and accountability in the modern university, is the requirement to ensure, to the public, quality assurance and accountability that will require an adjustment regarding government management and university administration. Thus, in Ontario we witness a shift in higher education funding, as the recent Conservative provincial government policies of differentiation now provide several government priorities and metrics, which establish the foundation of the metrics found within the Strategic Mandate Agreement (MTCU, 2013).
In 2013, the Ministry reports that there are broadly two governing metrics which will lead to the establishment of current and future metrics and these are: 1) “Institution specific metrics identified by individual colleges and universities. Institution –specific metrics are optional, but help identify unique strengths. These are rooted in historical data to enable measurement of progress over time and are linked to the institutional internal planning process” (MTCU, 2013a, p. 13); 2) “System-wide metrics identified by the ministry. These metrics, based on current data collected or already available, are applicable to all institutions and form the basis for measuring progress” (MTCU, 2013a, p. 13).

The policy document then outlines the government’s six modules for their Differentiation Policy Framework/ Metrics so to modernize higher education in Ontario in 2013, which broadly speaking are: 1) Jobs, Innovation, and Economic Development; 2) Teaching and Learning; 3) Student population; 4) Research and Graduate Experience; 5) Program Offerings; and 6) Institutional Collaboration to Support Student Mobility (MTCU, 2013a, pp. 9-11). The MTCU (2103a) policy document posits that the SMA, along with Ontario’s Differentiation Policy, becomes the bedrock “for future alignment of government levers to support sustainability, a high-quality postsecondary education, and other government priorities” (MTCU, 2013a, p. 17). Furthermore, the report states that advancing forward the government of Ontario will require increased reporting by institutions of higher education that will integrate and make more efficient the Multi-Year Accountability Agreements (MTCU, 2013a).
Stable Funding, Strong universities

The *Ontario Differentiation Policy Frameworks* (2013) document states that of specific importance for the protection of Ontario’s universities will be the mission to maintain and promote the quality of programs and the experience of students who attend higher education in this province. Thus, of particular focus for the province becomes the quality of teaching, for which the MTCU states,

> The Ontario government recognizes that high-quality teaching is tied to improved student outcomes. The government sees this as a key priority and is committed to ensuring that postsecondary education in Ontario provides students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in their personal and career aspirations, and as engaged citizens (2013, p.7).

However, there appears to be an omission of the many other factors that shape student success and quality of learning in education as the above statement parodies much of the same policy discourse that is put forth by the OECD regarding PISA and the quality of teaching. Hence, borrowing from the OECD the shift in quality assurance and accountability in higher education, in the province of Ontario, takes yet another drastic turn in 2018 from unique, to standardized, when a newly elected Conservative government transforms the softly modeled SMA created under the provincial leadership of the Liberal government.

In 2013, the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities published yet one more report in the month following *Ontario’s Differentiation Policy Framework* (2013a) document. The purpose of this report, entitled *Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework* (2013b), is to restate the government’s priorities regarding its expansion plan for higher education in Ontario while also introducing the selection and approval criteria for the bid to expand existing institutions of higher education, whether that should be on
established sites or in a new satellite location. It is within this policy brief that the Ministry (2013b) re-introduces the role of the Strategic Mandate Agreement, as it relates to the bid for expansion for institutions of higher education, stating that each bid must be in line with the conditions of the Strategic Mandate Agreement that were created by the Ministry and agreed on by each individual institution (2013). It is also within this document that the punitive consequence of performance based funding is more clearly stated, when the document states,

Failure to comply with the requirements set out in this policy framework will affect provincial funding. Specifically, a new or expanded enrolment at the location of the expansion will not be recognized for funding through the college or university operating grants, and the institution will not be eligible for provincial capital funding at the location. Failure to comply could also affect future capital decisions by the provincial government with respect to other locations (2013b, p.10).

Thus, prior to the newly awarded provincial leadership of the Conservative government in 2019, there emerges a shift in higher education policy as articulated in the policy documents produced by the MTCU (2013a, 2013b).

In April of 2015, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities announced in its document, *University Funding Model Reform Consultation Paper* that the Ontario Liberal government will be advancing with the proposed changes in higher education. Thus, the Strategic Mandate Agreement is officially launched and introduced through three policy phases in the province of Ontario as a method to promote the strengthening of quality assurance and accountability of higher education in this province. Phase one, known as SMA1 (2014-2017), SMA2 (2017-2020), and SMA3 (2021-2023), are each endorsed by the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities and are now, under the provincial Conservative government, currently constructed around ten metrics of
assessment “with the stated aim of building on current strengths and to help drive system-wide objectives and government priorities (University Affairs, Spooner, 2018, p. 1). Six of the ten performance based funding metrics are based on skills and job outcomes. The remaining four metrics are based on economic and community impact.

The six performance based metrics for skills and job outcomes are as follow: “Graduate earnings, experiential learning, skills and competencies, graduate employment, institutional strength or focus, and graduation rates” (University World News, 2019, p.2). The following four metrics include economic and community, starting with: Research funding capacity (universities only) and apprenticeship-related (colleges only), research funding from industry sources or funding from industry sources, community or local impact, and institution specific (economic impact). Each, as Wendy Brown (2015) would argue, have an economic register.

Forward to the year 2020, where in January the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations publishes the brief, Stable funding, strong universities: Now is the time to invest in the future of Ontario postsecondary education (2020). The brief states that for well more than a decade the province of Ontario has been divesting in higher education, making higher education in this province the least supported, while driving tuition rates to be the highest in the country as universities struggle to maintain quality and provide equitable access (OCUFA, 2020). This becomes especially apparent in the wake of the recent Conservative government’s reversal of the 50 per cent tuition grant awarded to students from low-income families.

Specifically, the OCUFA (2020) brief argues, “Years of chronic underfunding of postsecondary education are impacting the quality and sustainability of Ontario’s world-
Further to this the paper states, that the quality of Ontario’s universities is in jeopardy due to the province having the highest number of student to professor ratio in the country, while placing amongst the highest in university tuition fees charged in the country, while also now having to agree to the lowest per cent of funding based on the irrational Strategic Mandate Agreement.

Rejecting the performance based funding model for universities under the Conservative provincial government, which breaks tradition with an established system of funding based largely on enrolment, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations argues that this dramatic shift, which now ties 60 per cent of capital funding, to the ten metrics mentioned, will lead to weakened autonomy, quality, accountability and equity in the university sector of Ontario (OCUFA, 2020). More specifically, the brief states, “By design, performance-based funding rewards institutions that meet specific targets while penalizing those who do not. In doing so, it denies vital funding to the institutions that need it most to improve their educational outcomes” (OCUFA, 2020, p.9).

OCUFA (2020) engaging with research from the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, and New Zealand, cite the deleterious effects of performance based funding in higher education, that include, but are not limited to, “shorter programs with less quality control, lower graduation requirements, increased hiring of precariously employed faculty, increased campus bureaucracy, and less institutional autonomy as government exercises more influence over which programs are offered” (p.10) and as mentioned the impact PBF has on access to university for those who come from marginalized backgrounds. Importantly, OCUFA points out that the ten metrics for assuring quality and
accountability “include no measures of teaching, research, or social impact of universities, all of which are essential to their missions and mandates” (2020, p. 10). In addition OCUFA argues, “These impacts cannot simply be measured through economic contributions but must also take into account the contributions postsecondary education makes to building knowledge, fostering innovative and critical thinking minds, and creating more equitable and inclusive societies” (2020, p.10).

As a result of the defunding of the university over the past decades, along with the heightened focus on quality assurance and accountability that is based on market outcomes, OCUFA (2020) in their brief suggest a rational strategy that will begin to re-strengthen the quality, accountability, and equity within higher education in this province that begin with “a modest starting point for addressing decades of underfunding” (p.1). Thus, OCUFA in January, 2020 proposed the following seven recommendations that can be found in greater detail within the report: 1) Improve the per-student funding grant in Ontario’s universities, 2) change the ambiguous and biased performance-based funding model and return to the successful enrolment-based model for funding of universities in Ontario, 3) Dismantle the destructive Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario and designate its public funding to students, 4) Provide a design for regeneration of faculty that backs change over the long haul, 5) Repeal the Ontario Divisional Court’s judgement, which presumes the “Student Choice Initiative” wrongful, 6) Revoke the Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, and 7) Thoughtfully and genuinely seek input with community members, in particular faculty, university administrators, university workers, and university students, before implementing different government regulations or policy actions.
Universities in Ontario, and Canada, to assure quality and accountability are in need of durable, energetic, and consistent funding support that does not wane due to economies or changes in government. Universities are special places in our collective societies that have progressed from providing an education for the elite, to embracing the importance of increased access of all qualified learners, so to promote the public good, on all levels, both intrinsically and extrinsically. Provincial divestment of support for universities pushes universities in Ontario to look toward increasing tuition fees and private funding, each of which erodes the essence of the public Canadian university.

**Chapter Summary**

The analysis presented in this chapter regarding, specifically, the recent implementation of the Strategic Mandate Agreement, for universities in Ontario, provides evidence that Ontario’s strategy for the improvement of quality assurance and accountability in higher education is dangerously flawed. Thus, I draw on Ozga (1987, 2019) and Ball’s (1997b) conceptualization of education policy research to provide a critical analysis of the Strategic Mandate Agreement and Performance Based Funding for universities in Ontario, Canada. Ozga (1987, 2019) argues how policy sociology, its theory and method, approach to the framing of policy challenges, their solutions, and who defines these challenges and solutions, all warrant critical inquiry. Ball (1997b), writing of education policy research suggests that education policies are oversimplified in their recommendation of any form of homogenous relationship among the social, political, economic, and cultural differences. Ball (1997b), also cautions that it would be naïve in intention to attempt to disengage from the advance in theory that shapes our discussions.
on the transformations of education, arguing truth and knowledge are the power of higher education.

As universities in Ontario have evolved to provide greater access to a growing number of diverse students, they continue to struggle with issues due to public underfunding (OFUCA, 2012). At the time of this research, the most recent statistics (2017-2018) show the Ontario government providing “an average of $7,915 in per student funding and preliminary estimates show that figure has declined further over the past two years. In 2019 the Conservative provincial government announced that it would be decreasing funding for higher education in Ontario by more than $400 million. This will reflect a ten per cent reduction in tuition fees that universities will be ineligible to recoup from any other government support. The Conservative government also announced that it would be removing the six-month grace period for recent graduates to begin the repayment of their government student loans. Furthermore, the Conservative provincial government stated that ancillary fees would become optional, thus affecting many of the services provided through school unions such as those for women, Indigenous, ethnic minority and LGBTQ individuals in higher education (People’s World, January 31, 2019). This level of funding, under the present Conservative provincial government, represents a staggering 20 per cent reduction since 2008-09” (OCUFA, 2020, p.5). The underfunding of Ontario’s universities impacts the government’s said goal to increase access and improve the quality of the students’ learning experience. These financial cuts in funding hold particular significance to institutions of higher education in Ontario’s more remote locations.
This chapter set out to provide a document analysis of quality assurance and accountability as educational policy has witnessed a shift from professional accountability to that of neoliberal accountability in higher education. This re-articulation of quality in higher education focuses on the three “E’s” introduced by the Thatcher government, which consist of: Economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. Policy documents on higher education produced both at the global, state and provincial level increasingly posit the quality of teaching and quality of the students’ learning experience as that which is most important regarding student success. This justification has led many nations worldwide to adopt neoliberal mechanisms in the assessment of quality and accountability.

Thus, the newly defined value of the quality of higher education, framed through the Conservative government’s most recently adopted policy documents of the Strategic Mandate Agreement in Ontario, have very serious implications regarding the quality of learning, autonomy, and equity. For, as mentioned above the newly adopted funding structure, framed through the Conservatives Strategic Mandate Agreement places several under-represented groups at risk while forcing universities to look to privatization. This newly re-articulated strategy on quality assurance, accountability, and the value of higher education framed by a neoliberal rationality presents yet again an off-loading of responsibilities from government to individuals. The Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA, 2013) when addressing the discussion paper by the MTCU (2012), state, “Institutions and systems are complicated and organic, and it is folly to attempt to impose a structure upon them from above” (p. 1). This then brings me to my research findings based on semi-structured qualitative interviews with faculty
members and senior administrators from different universities located in southwestern Ontario, Canada.
Chapter 5: Findings- Faculty Members

Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings from interviews with six faculty members that provide insight regarding how quality assurance and accountability has come to be understood and practiced/enacted under a neoliberal rationality. Each interviewee selected was a faculty member and they represented the following fields: Education, Social Science, Humanities, or Liberal Arts for as noted by Hall (2011b), Beck (2012), and Brown (2015) each of these fields are in crisis due to the neoliberal agenda. Hence, this chapter reveals the subjective experiences as shared by six faculty members regarding how they have come to understand and experience quality assurance and accountability in higher education as framed through neoliberalism within the Canadian context.

Each interviewee selected for this study shared similar and at times varied deep concerns regarding the shifting culture of higher education, the work that they do as viewed through neoliberalism, and the implications of what the current measurement mania means to assuring quality and accountability of learning in higher education in the 21st Century. While several themes emerge from these interviews, it is only when critically engaging with the experiences shared by the interviewees that the following three themes emerge as paramount for faculty members. Hence, this chapter will be divided into three sections: 1) Quality Assurance & the Annual Evaluation: Evidence or Surveillance? 2) Datafication & A Politics of Refusal and 3) Academic Entrepreneurship:
The Intensification of Publish, Get Large-Scale Grants, or Perish. Thus, it is at this point that I will begin by sharing my research findings from the case study on the enactment of quality assurance and accountability as they relate to the themes mentioned for faculty members in higher education before moving on to my research findings for administrators in higher education in the following chapter.

**Quality Assurance & the Annual Evaluation: Evidence or Surveillance?**

Researching the shift from professional accountability to that of neoliberal accountability, Ranson (2003) reports that in England the rise in neoliberal accountability can be traced from the mid-1970s and that such a rationality has only served to reinforce *regimes* of neoliberal accountability so that “accountability is no longer merely an important instrument or component within the system, but constitutes the system itself” (p.459). This bears special consideration when contemplating current concepts of quality assurance, accountability and the rise of the ‘audit society’ in higher education as posited by Power (1999). This also bears special consideration regarding the shift in education from teaching being that of a performative act to that of performativity, as posited by Lyotard (1997) and later by Ball (2001) as to what datafication might mean to future measures for quality assurance and accountability in higher education.

As the neoliberal rationality of higher education continues, whereby greater influence is given to marketization and governance, education is now perceived as the economic force to drive and sustain a nation’s growth (Lingard and Rawolle, 2009; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). This economic and political re-articulation of education has also experienced a shift towards a culture of comparison, where increasingly “comparative performance data and comparative indicators in relation to national education and
training systems (Brown et al., 1997) [act] as a measure of likely economic prosperity and success of economic policies” (Lingard and Rawolle, 2009, p. 9). However, those who advocate the neoliberal rationality in higher education, argue that this rationality is required to bring universities into the 21st century during an era of increasing global competition and rankings (European Commission, 2011; Middlehurst, 2016).

This re-articulation of education has led many universities to place greater emphasis on the auditing process, that for the purpose of this study will be known simply as the Annual Evaluation (AE). However, when investigating quality assurance and accountability, as framed by the AE in higher education, concepts and words such as evidence, control, surveillance, and autonomy that are framed through a neoliberal understanding of quality assurance and accountability begin to percolate from within each interview. The experiences, shared by each interviewee, return me to the research of Simon Marginson (2008), who when researching academic autonomy raises the question of academic self-determination and intellectual creativity. Marginson’s (2008) research explores the effects of New Public Management (NPM) in “the constitution of academic self-determination and the scope of the radical-creative imagination” (Marginson, 2008, p. 272).

When discussing the annual evaluation, each participant shares very personal accounts relating to quality assurance, their sense of accountability, their annual evaluation and notions of evidence or surveillance. However, it should be noted that each interviewee before sharing of their experience regarding their AE are specifically asked how they conceptualize quality assurance within their practice in their university, which then led organically to discussions regarding their evaluation. Discussing the concept of
quality of learning and quality assurance, Helen with a Master’s degree, had more than
two decades of teaching experience in her department both at the undergraduate and
graduate levels as a faculty member. Today it would be unusual to have a faculty member
without an earned doctorate. Helen notes the changes she has witnessed over the years in
her department commenting on the decreasing enrolment of students in her field,

For years I taught sociology. I started out teaching sociology. I
taught most of the sociology courses back then. For years I did
Intro to sociology, which I started out back in the 1990s with
about 1400 students. Now Intro to sociology draws about 700
students, which considering the situation across Canada isn’t
bad because there was certainly a flight out of the humanities
and social sciences in the 2000s for students because they were
looking for courses that were directly related to what they
would do in terms of what they thought their careers would be.

Helen, when speaking of teaching since the early 1990s, is asked to share how she
perceives quality as an educator in the university. Responding, Helen remarks on the
following concerns that speak of the top-down pressures brought about by her
administration regarding how the assessment of quality of learning of her students is to
take place, stating that as an educator this creates a sense of entitlement for some
students,

How do you assure quality assurance? Well, I think that I have
seen the quality of learning go down over the decades that’s
for sure [begins to laugh]! Um (pauses)...that’s a tough one?
There’s so much pressure on us, as educators, to lower the bar
and I would say even if we didn’t want to lower the bar we’re
being forced to by the administration.

The administration in our sociology department increased the
grade averages for the classes we teach now that we have to
attain! The administration did that! They put that into effect
last summer. The grade averages for first year students used to
be on average between 65 and 68 per cent. Now our
administration demands that the average grades for first year
students in sociology now be 67 to 70 per cent. But, the quality of learning by the student is questionable as a result.

Helen continues by sharing that due to these top-down reforms by administration in her department, she has witnessed a ‘qualitative shift’ in what quality education means in the university. Helen states that due to these reforms she has witnessed a shift in the culture of the university, as students go from attending university as a learner to attending university as a consumer,

Oh! I mean what you will see is that there are always bright lights! There are young folk, students, that are just wonderful in terms of how bright they are, how committed, determined, what workers these students are! The effort they will put into their studies.

But, I guess I would say a lot of the students now are part of the great unwashed and that started to become evident after we passed the year 2000. By 2003, I certainly, and I know others in the University could also see some kind of a shift going on. What I saw was a qualitative shift in terms of what we would call, what I would call, what became known as the “Me Too Generation”, which was tied to always being on forms of media; also a sense of entitlement. The students’ sense of entitlement was huge and there was a shift in terms of what they, as students, expected from the university and what they were prepared to do.

This speaks to research on neoliberalism and the transformation of students from learners to consumers. Thus, while quality assurance and accountability are important in higher education, educators within higher education are expressing frustration at restrictions of providing quality instruction while being held to account in their annual evaluation when students do not succeed beyond a certain set of metrics that are beyond the educator’s control.
Kate, a former high school teacher, who is now a tenured professor within the field of education, talks of the historical similarities she has witnessed regarding the reforms taking place in higher education at present when she draws a comparison to the same measures that took place in primary and secondary education in the early 1990s in Ontario, when higher education was still somewhat sheltered from the neoliberal agenda. Kate remarks,

Well, there were a number of different reforms that were brought in at the time when I was a teacher in the 1990s. One of them was around ‘Teacher Performance Appraisal’. Teacher Performance Appraisal really tried to quantify in many ways how teachers were teaching and what couldn’t be measured; what didn’t count-in terms of one’s teaching. It is a limited assessment of one’s professionalism I suppose I would say. A principal would go into your classroom and watch you teach once every couple of years. There was a lot of paper work. Accountability was a big word that was used a lot during that time and still is to this day.

Thus, what Kate witnessed in education more than 30 years ago in Ontario, was the cartography of a system for what counts as quality assurance and accountability now in higher education as articulated in the MTCU (2012) Discussion Paper when the Ministry states, “Our government has created a K-12 system that has been acknowledged as the best in the English-speaking world. By building on this strength, we have the opportunity to modernize our post secondary system” (p.5).

Kate speaking further of these reforms then raises questions regarding autonomy, evidence, and surveillance of teachers as professionals when referring to the reforms brought into effect in Ontario for elementary and secondary school teachers reforms that mandated teachers to participate in regular professional development programmes so as to maintain their teaching certification in the province of Ontario. However, Kate shares
that this “implied that teachers had not been engaging in professional development on their own”. We then begin to see the shift towards the de-professionalization of teaching whereby teachers are placed at the centre of student achievement, a shift that has increasingly been taking place within higher education in Ontario.

Continuing to comment on the de-professionalization of teachers and the concept of quality, Kate shares that when she took time to pursue her Master’s of Education at a prestigious university abroad that when she returned her school board at the time, did not recognize this achievement as professional development. This leads Kate to express the following regarding the narrow concept of quality in education,

The irony for me was that the only kind of professional development that counted were professional development workshops created by the school board that was related directly to student achievement. So, I did my Master’s. I took a leave, without pay, for a year. I did my Master’s degree in Education and that did not count or qualify as a form of professional learning because it wasn’t directly or narrowly related to student achievement.

The narrow concept of what counts as quality that Kate speaks of becomes a recurring theme among faculty members in this study, particularly as it relates to their Annual Evaluation. At the time of this research the annual evaluation of a faculty member at the universities in this study was based on three criteria: 1) Teaching, weighted at forty percent; 2) Research, weighted at forty percent; 3) Service, weighted at twenty percent. Thus, an important aspect of the annual evaluation of the quality of a faculty member in universities has become the student evaluation of their course content, the teaching provided for the said course, the number of publications, and citations; although, at present this is changing in Ontario through the framework of the newly designed Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA).
Jessie, an Associate Professor in Education, provides a compelling account of how quality assurance and accountability is at present understood and experienced within the context of a Canadian university when she raises questions regarding the origin of quality assurance, accountability, and its applicability within higher education,

You know here’s the thing. Let’s divide that question into what do we mean by quality? And, what do we mean by assurance? First, I would look at those that want to regulate us around quality assurance, because there is power attached to this-around quality assurance!

So, I feel that quality assurance comes from school effectiveness and school improvement literature. Effectiveness and improvement literature in business is all about a Taylorestic perspective where you have assembly lines and there are these things you have, they are raw materials. Something happens and then there’s a product at the end and so they want to measure to make sure the quality in the end is consistent.

Furthermore, Jessie goes on to share how quality assurance and accountability, at present framed through a cost-benefit model, leaves her feeling as though it is about some kind of regulation beyond her control,

So, when I hear ‘quality assurance’ it’s about some kind of regulation beyond my control trying to make sure that, me, as the resource, which means personnel that something happens to me and I do the little check in the ‘black box’. Something comes out at the end. Something is produced, or manufactured, which would either be my research or a students’ success as a certain pre-determined level or standard. And, the ‘assurance’ for me is a cost-benefit analysis as well. That’s how I understand it.

The above expresses the shift from that of professional accountability to that of neoliberal accountability that Ranson (2003) speaks of. In their research on Globalizing Educational Accountabilities, authors, Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti and Sellar (2016) posit, “What is counted affects what counts in schooling today and is central to how educational
accountabilities is framed” (p.1). Furthermore, Lingard et al (2016) when drawing from earlier research by Nikolas Rose state that Rose (1988, p.187) “speaks about the role of numbers as a function of biopolitics that establishes both a “regime of visibility” and a “grid of code ability” thereby constituting a navigable space of commensurability, equivalence, and comparison that renders the population amenable to administration, statistical mapping, and governance” (p.2).

Yet, each of the above articulations of quality assurance, accountability, and the AE struggles to capture the social, cultural, and political experiences of academics within higher education and what this might mean to our understanding of quality assurance and accountability. When asking faculty members how they conceptualize quality assurance in higher education Kate’s response begins to reveal the connection that quality assurance and accountability now directly have with regard to her faculty’s annual evaluation that are deemed as evidence of quality and accountability,

Well, as I’ve said in terms of the work that I do, quality is defined in terms of my teaching and my research and my service according to a set of criteria on the AE. So, with respect to teaching it’s the student’s questionnaire on courses and teaching. However, when this same interviewee is asked to comment on the current measures of quality in higher education, at the time of this research, which are based to a large degree on quantified learning outcomes, Kate shares the following,

So, that’s the other thing that the administration would mention, is the notion of ‘learning outcomes’, which is directly related to how quality is defined and conceptualized today. So, that is first of all designing or coming up with learning outcomes. Those outcomes need to be clearly stated and they need to be measurable as well.
So, if you have a learning outcome around student satisfaction with courses then you would measure that through a survey and numerical data that would come out of that survey in order to understand student satisfaction with a particular course. So, learning outcomes, again, narrow - how we understand what quality is and then subsequently, narrow how we go about providing a quality education to the students in university.

The significance of higher education and its purpose, as expressed in this study, has shifted dramatically over the past four decades as access by a diverse population of students continues to grow and the importance of knowledge for economic development continues to shape the values of the university (Berg and Seeber, 2016; Brown, 2015; Brownlee, 2015; Giroux, 2014). Educational research engaging in critical studies of education increasingly posits the cause of these dramatic changes to be that of the increasing authority of neoliberalism coupled with the reduced fiscal support provided by government. In Canada, Shanahan (2009) reports, “we have seen provincial governments increasingly adopting market mechanisms in funding and resource allocation. Business and private sector criteria are employed to make education decisions” (p.3). Yet, while it is thought that neoliberalism as an economic project has failed, neoliberalism as an educational project, that universities globally adopt, is said to have transformed the culture and purpose of higher education (Torres, 2011).

Ball (2003), writing of the performative nature of education and the work that teachers now do, suggests that to gain deeper insight into the “subjectivities of change and the changing subjectivities” (p.217) of teachers, one must be prepared to push past the notion of objectivity that currently grounds and steers educational research arguing that such reforms in education not only create changes in the individual subject; they also
change how the subject interacts with others. Ball (2015a) when theorizing the concept of neoliberalism and that of subjectivity states, “subjectivity is a key site of political struggle in the contexts of neoliberalisation and neoliberal governmentality” (p.1).

The concept of subjectivity creates a seamless recurring theme that shall be revealed in each of my research findings regarding quality assurance, accountability, and neoliberalism in higher education. Yet, it becomes prudent to share one other concept that I am hopeful will provide a deeper understanding into the professional experiences shared by each interviewee in this study and this is Wendy Brown’s (2015) rendering of homo oeconomicus. Brown (2015) offers, “how the neoliberal triumph of homo oeconomicus as the exhaustive figure of the human is undermining democratic practices and a democratic imaginary by vanquishing the subject that governs itself through moral autonomy and governs with others through popular sovereignty” (p. 79).

Hoping to learn more about each participant’s experience of professional accountability as a faculty member they are asked to whom do they feel accountable within the setting of their university? It is here that a disconnect in the literature reviewed occurs; for while each faculty member shares shades of Brown’s (2015) rendering of homo oeconomicus, each faculty member somehow maintains a strong belief in their own autonomy for the work that they do in the university. Thus, what emerges from conversations with six faculty members are underlying experiences shared by each regarding quality assurance and accountability framed through a neoliberal rationality and how this has come to shape their understanding of their Annual Evaluation (AE).

When discussing accountability in higher education David, who comes from an inter-disciplinary department, shares the sense of autonomy he experiences toward being
held to account in his work and the lack of pressure he experiences as being accountable, is professionally for him a moral consideration,

I would like to give you two answers to this question on accountability. I found myself always being the most important person for being accountable to myself. So, I am doing it morally! I’m doing it in the context of the university, for I want to be a good colleague.

I want to be a part of my department to advance things and to help with the teaching of the students.

I believe that I have a very good sense of what I can do and what I should do. So, from this perspective I barely have had this feeling of pressure. I don’t feel pressure here because my expectations are higher than anyone around, that’s my own! Almost like a philosophy!

I want to make it the best for me first and if I’m satisfied with my sense of being accountable that’s fine then. Other people’s say can help me too. Others can help me to evaluate, or re-evaluate, my teaching. But, others in my department cannot put pressure on me.

I guess for me it’s inherent that I can be as good as I can be, if we are talking about quality and accountability.

The above experience shared by David brings me once again back to the work of Marginson (2008) when he sets out to explore the role of self-determination or what he at times refers to as self-determining freedom of researchers and scholars. Self-determining freedom is contextual and universal Marginson (2008) argues, when situated in higher education. Jessie supports the concept of context when she is asked to elaborate on what quality assurance means in higher education. Jessie shares the following regarding quality, context, and equity,

Quality assurance could be either the government making sure that they’re getting their ‘bang for the buck’. For whatever money the government is putting into higher education. Or, it’s for students saying what they are getting out of their program for the cost of it. I hate to say this, because it sounds negative, but I really feel that nothing positive ever came out from
quality assurance in many kinds of ways. I feel this because quality assurance does not necessarily consider the inequities that exist within pre-existing systems. Quality assurance doesn’t challenge the system to think about those inequities, even though quality assurance is to be about effectiveness for improvement. Sometimes it’s a notion of what’s effective isn’t necessarily equitable.

Reviewing research on quality assurance and accountability policy in higher education words such equity are often, if not all together, missing. In place of equity, often words such as “opportunity to modernize”, “productivity”, and “entrepreneur”, “grow our economy”, “acceleration of knowledge” and “increased innovation” are found instead (MTCU, 2012, pp. 5-7).

Thus, if a faculty members ‘performance’ is to be evaluated, based on a set of standardized criteria are faculty being evaluated in an equitable manner? What measurements could equitably assure quality and accountability? Who determines these criteria? Who then becomes judge? What will these criteria tell us about the quality of teaching and research? Or, what will these criteria possibly miss? As standardized measures for quality assurance and accountability in higher education are increasingly being adopted, globally, they are largely framed through the soft policy governance of the OECD. Alexander, a tenured faculty member from the Field of Education, who achieved all of his education abroad, thus, lends an international perspective to standardized measures for quality assurance and accountability in education.

My interview with Alexander spanned over two plus hours as I became quite captivated by the professional experiences this individual shared. Alexander expresses passion, commitment, and an indelible record of global scholarship that focuses on issues of social equity. Alexander shares the problematic nature standardized measures of
assuring quality and accountability raise regarding issues of equity in education with the following insights regarding PISA. This holds special concern for the recently paused OECD (2012) project on higher education that was titled *Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes* (AHELO). The AHELO was designed by the OECD to measure critical thinking and the quality of learning outcomes as set out through the use of a standardized test for university students. Alexander shares with me the following regarding increasing public awareness of quality and accountability, the use of standardized testing in education, and its link to the rise of ranking systems of education,

There is an increased government and public awareness regarding quality assurance and accountability. And even as I say that, it is important to know that universities are also increasingly ranked. Education systems are ranked through the OECD and PISA. I have critiqued this. Do you know how standardization creates a redefinition of equity? This is extremely important and it is complicated.

As policies brought about through global standardization increasingly seduce higher education, considerations regarding the rise of the measurement mania and the pressures of performativity are important considerations for universities and university policies that are in need of addressing the ever-changing culture and complexities of higher education. Jessie comments on some of these complexities with the following perspective when evaluating the quality of research in higher education,

When measuring and assessing the *quality* of the research one does, it is important in recognizing that ‘quality’ is not necessarily a *neutral* term. You will have people who will say to you, “Oh, you know that *anecdotal* research”? No, I don’t know that *anecdotal* research! Do you mean *qualitative* research! So, you know it’s not neutral. So, it may not necessarily be *better quality* but it might be in recognizing there are different contexts in which quality is understood.
Thus, these narrow understandings of quality assurance and accountability led many of the participants in this study to share similar words when discussing quality assurance, accountability, and their AE as words such as the *shifting culture, evidence, surveillance, pressure, market, competitive, context* and *performativity* are used.

Ball (2003), when discussing performativity posits that “The novelty of this epidemic of reform is that it does not simply change what people, as educators, scholars and researchers do, it changes who they are” (p.215). I thought of this statement penned by Ball (2003) when interviewing Alexander and our discussion on quality and accountability. Alexander, appearing conflicted by the changes he has experienced in higher education in Canada both as an educator and researcher, continues to believe that he does experience more autonomy within his profession than most others from different professions. However, while Alexander shares his sense of professional autonomy, what Alexander expresses also made me feel perplexed when he talks of the tensions experienced between that of student achievement, the quality of work being produced by students, and his feelings of compromise and defeat. The following statement also reveals how the quality of a program translates to that which Brown (2015/2017) describes as *homo oeconomicus* as Alexander comments on the tensions brought about when administrations in universities place greater emphasis on money as a signifier of quality,

There is this tension. *That’s the word!* There is this tension that you just have to get students through. But, you can’t *compromise* on the quality of the work being created in a university. I think that there is a *compromising* element now that has *crept* into our faculty. I don’t believe that people really care about *quality*. This is the *culture* I’m now seeing in the university.

The *administration* is saying let’s have more programs to *make* more money. So, the *emphasis* on everything gets funneled into
making money. Quality is all about that! It’s not about the quality of teaching and research in our programs. You know when I think about some of the students in our graduate program, you know what? I don’t ever want to teach in the graduate program again.

That this individual, invested in his work for humanistic purposes, does not ever want to teach again within the graduate program of their department troubles me greatly. Worldwide policy on the quality of education is being explored, reformed, and re-created, stating time and again the significance of economic connectivity and the greater need for critical and creative engagement by future learners for global humanist and innovative purposes. Yet time and again educators with a critical and equitable lens are being reformed due to a neoliberal rationality where what counts in education is that which can be counted. We live in a highly complex time with political, economic, and great social (cultural, environmental, and health) uncertainty on a global level. As a possibilist, when I hear educators such as Alexander share such despair I cannot help but feel profound despair for our future. Paulo Freire over the course of his lifetime of writing on the topic of education and equity argued that education is liberation. How will we move forward as a global society if the teachings of individuals such as those of Alexander’s are erased?

Alexander’s experience regarding the tensions he feels concerning the quality of his students’ learning experience and the compromise he feels he is to make reminded me of Norton’s (2016) research on ‘Teaching and learning in today’s universities’ when she argues the following,

Most academics come into higher education as a result of their passion for their subject, a thirst to create and advance knowledge through research and their wish to pass it on; most are genuinely concerned that the student experience should be good, and some identify teaching as the main purpose of their
role. However, they work in places where there is a necessity for institutions to make sure they stay afloat (p. 156).

Ball’s (2003) study on the *terrors of performativity* speaks of some the tensions brought about in education through the increasing focus on performativity. Ball (2003) begins his study with a foreshadowing tale from a newspaper journalist who writes of the rising role of the marketization of education in a society that seeks to find answers to our most pressing human experiences. Ball writes,

> In a recent newspaper article addressing the increasingly dominant role of numbers and statistics in modern society, Boyle (2001) made a simple but telling point: ‘We take our collective pulse 24 hours a day with the use of statistics. We understand life that way, though somehow the more figures we use, the more the great untruths seem to slip through our fingers. Despite all that numerical control, we feel ignorant of the answers to the big questions as ever’” (Boyle, 2001 in Ball, 2003, p. 215).

The above sentiment is reflected in the experiences as faculty members when both Kate and Jessie comment on the evidence by numbers that is required of them to collect and compile as a portfolio for their Annual Evaluation; evidence of their quality and accountability as professors, which is required by the Dean of each of their respective departments. Kate notes,

> So, when I submit *my* information to the committee every year for assessment, for my Annual Evaluation, I am very attentive to including *all* of the *citations* that I have had for each of my articles; the *impact* factor of each of the journals that I have. I also collect data from Academia.edu, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate of the number of reads of my articles as well as the number of citations. *Any kind of quantitative data* that I can provide the committee will *look* better for me.

When Jessie is asked to comment on her annual evaluation, Jessie also speaks of the numerical importance of data collected for her portfolio that must be submitted. Jessie
also shares the frustration in trying to understand the expectations of her Annual Evaluation report that she is to provide each year and the possible politics involved,

The annual evaluation is the \textit{bane} of my existence! Well, I think it depends on how you look at the evaluation. I mean I look at them and I say, \textit{begrudgingly}, that \textit{I} put them together. However, in the back of my mind I say to myself that I could be spending this time working on a research article. I don’t do well on the Annual Evaluation. I don’t do well on the evaluations because that’s the other thing that your graduate school does not prepare you for- the \textit{emotional labour} that is attached to our work in higher education. So, the emotional labour, for me, in preparing the annual evaluation is that: a) I don’t think that they are \textit{transparent} and b) I think it’s a \textit{crapshoot}. I think even though a committee does the evaluation, it will really depend on who is on that committee.

Continuing to discuss the criteria of her annual evaluation, which is an important part of the tenure process, Jessie shares that though working for many years as a professor, researcher, and government consultant, she has yet to receive tenure. Jessie shares the following with regard to the amount of administrative work that she must attend so to provide an assessment of the performativity of one’s work as a faculty member for her annual evaluation report,

It’s administrative work. So, it’s keeping track of all your publications. It’s keeping track of all the presentations that you have done. It is keeping track of all the stuff you do! So, it takes time and then you have to present the report in a way that might be \textit{meaningful} to your committee. There is a lot of information that we must compile. These evaluation reports are long, and people are \textit{busy}, and so they are \textit{rushed}. Yet, you want to make sure these annual evaluation reports are \textit{clear} and \textit{accurate} and all of those kinds of things.

The above experience shared by Jessie is echoed by an American scholar who writes of the tenure process at his university in the United States. Kamden Strunk (2020), an associate professor of educational research, when writing on issues of equity, the
tenure process, and his annual departmental evaluation shares concerns regarding the lack of transparency with regard to the actual tenure process, the politics involved, the anxiety experienced by scholars going through the evaluation process. Strunk (2020), in his opinion piece for the publication of Inside Higher Ed, goes on to share that the process for the Annual Evaluation begins to feel like a sales pitch with the sales person not clear on what they are pitching. Elaborating on the confusion of this process and the impact it has for historically marginalized academics Strunk (2020) states,

> But at many colleges and universities around the country, pre-tenure faculty receive various and conflicting messages about what it takes to get tenure, with various notions of how many publications it might take, what kind of teaching evidence (if any) will be needed and how grants and funding factor into decisions. In other words, the ways these votes will be decided are often opaque and, in some cases, a moving target (paragraph 5).

However, what is of most concern for Strunk (2020) is the lack of transparency for the evaluation of the tenure process, the lack of informed collegial support when compiling evidence for the annual assessment, the sense of secrecy with regard to the process and most importantly the sense of how this lack of transparency contributes to the policing of an academic border that makes it increasingly difficult for scholars from marginalized backgrounds to advance. Once more, returning to Jessie who speaks to the frustration experienced in trying to understand exactly what is expected from her when crafting her Annual Evaluation, Jessie shares the following,

> So I think it’s a crapshoot! I think- you know what I think? I think we should start an experiment! Let’s just put up a dartboard and somebody throws a dart for everybody and we just see how that turns out for their rating? Like seriously! I don’t think it is any different! I find that I am trying to fill out for these reports, what I do here? What do I do there? Does this
go here? Does this go there? Putting everything in one place, presenting it in a *nice* format. Formats that matter!

So, I have consulted a previous Associate Dean and asked him to help me with my Annual Evaluation; he showed me his own annual evaluation, and I filled my report out the way he did it. Then I spoke to my *current* Dean and she suggested adding certain things, which I did but it didn’t seem to make *any* difference. Then I went back to my Dean the following year and said maybe there are some examples that could be provided as examples for how I am to craft my annual evaluation? My Dean gave me some examples; I went home and re-crafted everything again! I don’t think it made *any* difference.

I then ask Jessie if participating in her faculty’s annual evaluation is mandatory and what might happen if one were to refuse to participate in creating their reports in the manner requested? Jessie’s reply speaks to notions of surveillance, the rise in individualism and competition in the university, when she states the following,

> I think that if you do not participate in the annual evaluation in the prescribed way that is suggested, that you are socially penalized. You don’t have to submit the report, but I think people will look down on you then. Once again, we have to understand that this is also learning that I didn’t get from grad school. *Academia* breeds insecurity; academia is almost like a federation where you have people who work individually and have to *compete* for limited *resources* and then are *expected* to get along. That doesn’t *work* well; the competition could be *less* too! You know it *breeds individualism*! And, that’s really *sad* actually because there is a *tension* there. We know from people who do research around higher education that people who *collaborate* do way better on these annual evaluations because they have more publications. But, also their *research* is *richer*! They have more *support* and those kinds of things. But *yet* there’s this *tension* of individualism.

This concept of surveillance under the punitive lens of what constitutes quality assurance and accountability in higher education is something that Ulrich Beck (2012) addressed in his last book published entitled *Twenty Observations On A World In Turmoil*. Beck (2012) speaks of the preoccupations with respect to the micro monitoring
of all that one does as a professor in a university and the increased sense of surveillance under the pretense of accreditation and evaluations. Beck, suggests that contemporary criteria for annual evaluations of a professor’s performance are in turn causing the light of entire programs, and I would argue the bright light of certain academics, to dim when he writes,

In the end, chronically understaffed institutes in the social sciences and the humanities are no longer able to offer their own degrees. The last remaining expert in each field switched out the light. In order to ensure that everything occurs in an orderly fashion, however, the state is developing a kind of McKinsey-Stalinism in the guise of networks of accreditors, evaluators, educational planners and educational spies (2012, pp.53-54).

Alexander speaks to this very experience that Beck (2012) has outlined when sharing a very personal experience regarding his annual evaluation. Alexander, notes what happened after a few of his students complained to the Dean that their course readings were biased deeming that the readings were based on Alexander’s research, research that Alexander has achieved large federally funded grants for and has had published in top-tier journals globally. The Dean’s reaction raised the following concerns regarding judgement, control, and attrition,

The Dean removed me from teaching the course and that’s fine. I had taught that course for so many years. I was a bit upset initially and then I quickly switched because I thought this-these students, now here, I am not enjoying anymore. The graduate students that now enter our program are very low level and I am no longer doing the job of a supervisor. I received some awful feedback on the student evaluation. I actually had three students state that they dropped out of my course, [because] they were of a certain belief, and they stated that I was imposing my own ideology into the course content and that this was a concern for the other students.
The above speaks to issues of standardization in education, the strength of the student evaluation as part of the annual evaluation of a professor, surveillance, and attrition. The above also speaks to the kind of administration that places greater value on an economic register rather than the value of critical scholarship. Alexander positing the importance of critical scholarship and learning to think more broadly and reflexively has this to share,

And, I thought just because you are of a particular faith, or orientation, does not mean that you can come in to a university class, a graduate level class, and say that the entire course was my pushing a certain ideology. So, I went through the course syllabus to see how many articles I had that represented the three students concern? I had maybe two or three, and each was presented specifically from a feminist perspective. So, that was interesting to me!

So, when the student evaluation from the three students came up at my annual evaluation, the Acting Dean at the time came up to me and said, you know, they want this new person coming in who has a degree from a highly ranked university to lead the course. I thought then do it! I don’t want to teach this course anymore. Do it! I don’t want to teach in this program anymore because what you are getting for graduate students - it’s just not the same quality of student as it was in previous cohorts.

Acker and Wagner’s (2017) argument, although speaking to the “practice of hiring casual staff” (p.4) in the university, support Alexander’s experience when they state, “Academics must acquiesce to repeated measurements of their productivity (Morley, 2016) within the audit culture (Shore and Wright, 2000). Teaching is similarly subject to accounting through measures of student satisfaction (Shah and Sid Nair, 2012). At the same time, the job security and expectations of academic freedom traditionally underlying university teaching and research are undermined…” (p.4).
Thus, once we seek the bravery to question, refuse, and reflexively place ourselves in the participation of the neoliberal model of ‘what counts is what can be counted’ in a university education will we then mature, grow, and evolve in a manner that will dare to know the truth. At no other time has this been more important than in the wake of global events in the year 2020. This then brings me to my next research finding regarding quality assurance and accountability as it relates to the datafication of the performance of faculty members and their notion of resistance, or as Ball (2003) aptly calls it, a politics of refusal, regarding neoliberal rationality in higher education.

**Datafication & A Politics of Refusal**

Ball (2015a) when writing of neoliberalism and the subjectivity of teachers suggests, “[t]he point is that neoliberal economies, sites of government and points of contact are also sites for the possibility of refusal. However, the starting point for a politics of refusal is the site of subjectivity. It is a struggle over and against what it is we have become, what it is that we do not want to be” (p.15). Marginson (2008) when researching the autonomy of academics in higher education and the technologies employed that are used to regulate and make rational the purpose of higher education through the use of numbers explains some of the different techniques used by New Public Management (NPM) as framed through the economic philosophies of F.A. Hayek, Friedman, and the Chicago School. Furthermore, Marginson (2008) when investigating the transformations of higher education incorporates into his paper the work of Amartya Sen for a deeper understanding of neoliberalism in the twenty-first century. Investigating these transformations in the university, Marginson (2008) also turns to the work of Foucault to explain that it is not simply enough to record the changes occurring to academic
autonomy; that what we must attempt is an understanding of how these transformations of academic autonomy are transforming their self-identity. When looking at Foucauldian concepts of power and self, Ball recommends that what Foucault really wants to understand in his discussion on power are the spaces of freedom. Hence, I begin with trying to reveal academic resistance/refusal through the concept of autonomy. Marginson (2008) writing of academic autonomy states the following,

Of course, focus on the transformation rather than the negation of forms of freedom is not a new idea. It [the transformation rather than the negation of freedom] was a core argument of Michel Foucault two decades ago and is utilized by social theorists and historians working in post-Foucauldian tradition. Such an approach enables a more nuanced account of power in sites such as universities (p. 271).

When researching faculty members’ experiences of autonomy in the university it is not enough to focus solely on what has changed; but how and why these changes are transforming the individual’s profession and their sense of self within this study. Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) in the closing pages of their book on policy enactment in secondary schools in England speak of the silences that continue to evade research on education when they affirm, “One of the ‘silences’ that is a constant presence in our work is the persistent sociological question of the relationship between power, agency and the space for alternatives” (p.149). Thus, the concepts of power, agency and the space for alternatives not only become an element of great interest for this study on higher education they become an emergent theme.

Hayek’s notion of autonomy and Sen’s concepts of well being and agency are central to Marginson’s (2008) thesis on academic freedom and self-determination. With regard to the concepts of well being and agency Marginson (2008) writes,
Sen’s contrast between well-being and agency has direct applicability in academic life. Many part-time faculty choose poorly paid temporary jobs rather than more secure and better paid employment elsewhere in order to pursue their vocation. For them agency freedom takes priority over well-being (p.277).

This sense of autonomy, how it contrasts with well being, and the potential to create a space for refusal is shared at different points within the interview process by each faculty member. When speaking of the contrast between that of autonomy, well being, and a space for refusal Jessie shares the importance of being true to oneself and her need for critical reflexivity as an academic,

> I have had to do a lot of soul searching about what I am willing to put up with and what I’m not willing to put up with in the academy. So, my example for you would be that part of my work, is in part my own personal agenda. Though I don’t necessarily-not all of my research is from a critical perspective. But, my research does challenge the status quo and what I mean by that is that sometimes I don’t necessarily use the language that would be from a critical social justice perspective. But, I definitely challenge the status quo and what that has allowed me to do, as an academic, is to have access to policy makers where I sit at the table and we have these conversations where I interject things that they should be thinking about.

Jessie when speaking directly to the concept of academic well being and that of spaces of refusal in her work, also speaks of the emotionally draining aspects of her profession. Jessie states that although aspects of her profession are debilitating, this interviewee would not change her approach to her work, for it is when working outside of her comfort zone, being critically reflexive, that Jessie feels that she is creating the most effective change in education policy. Jessie notes the following with regard to working from within the ‘belly of the beast’,
My research and my work are *emotionally draining*! Now my husband, also an academic, could never do what I do. My husband lays it out, he’s like, “I’m into social justice and equity and I don’t know how you can deal with those people? I could never do what you do and it is soul sucking and I would just die!” To which, there are times my work is soul sucking and exhausting. So, he and I come from - we deal with our approach to our work in two different ways. To which, I say to him, well at least on the ground I think I’m making more change in education than probably you might be in different kinds of ways.

The above statement by Jessie reminds me of Marginson (2008) when drawing from a study on academic values conducted by Mary Henkel (2005), which explores “the notions of agency freedom and the pursuit of “good”. When investigating these concepts Henkel (2005) finds that faculty “identity is constructed in a continuous reflexive process that is a “synthesis of (internal) self definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others (Henkel, 2005, p.157 in Marginson, 2008, p. 278). This raises important questions regarding the power of language, the subjective experience of faculty members, and how much of this experience is self-imposed or externally driven. The above quote also raises questions with regard to the production of faculty identity that now is seen as an important part of the student recruitment process. Kate discusses this required self-manufacturing of her professional identity, the annual evaluation, and the role of datafication when she comments,

*Yes, and the other piece of our annual evaluation that I have not talked about, is the emphasis on presenting a particular image of oneself and spending time crafting that image.*

So, I can’t tell you the number of hours that I spend updating my ResearchGate, my Academia.edu and my faculty research profile. Not only with *pictures* but also with my *articles* that are published. *Responding* to requests for those articles or publications or other things. Including data on my various
pages of my sites around that. It’s, it’s, a lot of time spent documenting and presenting oneself to the world-at-large.

Our Dean encourages us to do that for a number of reasons, primarily around student recruitment. Students go to those sites, particularly our faculty websites, to view the work that we do. And, so there is a push to not only demonstrate the value of the work that we do, but also to show ourselves as being approachable as regular human beings. We’re told, you know, maybe it’s good to have a picture of you and your pets?

Thus, Kate brings us back to Brown (2015) and her discussion regarding neoliberalism, and the tensions created by Plato’s soul-state homology from the Republic. Brown’s account is that both the city and soul are each made of the same parts- “reason (philosophers), spirit (warriors), and appetite (workers)- and each is properly or improperly ordered in the same way. If appetite or spirit, rather than reason, governs either the individual or political life, the cost is justice or virtue” (2015, p. 22). When speaking of these tensions, Kate says,

So, we as faculty member must create these images of ourselves and in the creation and the production of these faculty websites we are producing our own identities in particular ways. We are being shaped as academics in particular ways. Ways that fit a set of standards and a set of norms that are externally developed around what we do.

Brown (2015) suggests that whilst political theorists have long tried to discount Plato’s homology it has always found a way of coming full circle,

Political theorists have challenged Plato’s homology often enough, yet it has a way of recurring. This book will suggest that neoliberal reason has returned it with a vengeance: both persons and states are construed on the model of the contemporary firm, both persons and states are expected to comport themselves in ways that maximize their capital value in the present and enhance their future value, and both persons and states do so through practices of entrepreneurialism, self-investment, and/or attracting investors (p. 22).
More importantly, what Kate shares regarding the significance of her presenting a ‘certain kind of image’ on her faculty website speaks to that which Appadurai posits as the social imaginary and that which Hall identifies as the heuristics of representation, each of which support academic entrepreneurship (Shahjahan et al., 2020).

All that has been shared thus far signifies deep change in our understandings of each other, our own self-identity, and our work as researchers and educators in higher education (Ball, 2012b). More specifically, Ball (2012b) writing of performativity, his own subjectivity as an academic and neoliberalism notes that it is reformation, rather than transformation, in the university that is taking place as a result of the neoliberal rationality that steers higher education in the 21st century. The following quote is important as it speaks to how this reformation of self challenges autonomy and the alternatives for refusal by the academic in higher education,

I want to consider, reflect on, imagine, some aspects of that ‘reformation’ brought about by that rough neoliberal beast and the concomitant changes in my academic subjectivity. In particular those aspects of reform that have required me to make myself calculable rather than memorable (Shamir, 2008, p.3 in Ball, 2012b, p.18).

Berg and Seeber (2016) speak of the importance of the distinction between making oneself calculable versus memorable by employing the theory of slow cooking. Berg and Seeber (2016) argue that in slowing down, professors are provided the ability to make their work more meaningful and less quantifiable. In their book The Slow Professor, the authors suggest that it becomes important for professors to slow down for slowing down allows for “the importance of contemplation, connectedness, fruition, and complexity” (p. 57). Furthermore, the authors assert that in slowing down “[i]t gives meaning to letting
research take the time it needs to ripen and makes it easier to resist the pressure to be faster. It gives meaning to thinking about scholarship as a community, not a competition” (2016, p. 57).

When discussing academic autonomy and spaces for refusal Kate reflects on her own professional journey regarding the significance of her faculty’s annual evaluation concerning the tenure process, the pressure she felt by her Dean to change her research so to attract large scale grants that would assist in her annual evaluation and promotion, and her refusal to so do at that time,

And I told the Dean at that point that I simply did not care about large-scale grants and how this affects my annual evaluation. That it did not matter to me. That I did not care and I would not change the kind of research that I do and apply for these large-scale SSHRC [Social Science Humanity Research Council] grants, which take a considerable amount of time. I have applied for them in the past and I have never been successful. Over my years, I applied maybe three or four times. I would say each of those grants, large-scale grants, take anywhere from three to five weeks to work on of ones time – solidly-solid time. This is a lot of time; a lot of time and effort. So, I decided, and this is in part protest, to not play the game. And, I told the Dean this. I told the Dean that I would not play the game.

John Brennan (2016) writes of these challenges in higher education brought about by the culture of marketization and competition that is framed through the pursuit of quality assurance. Drawing from the research of Calhoun (2006) Brennan comments on the change in academia, whereby the importance of one’s research is no longer that of generating new knowledge or sharing of knowledge, but simply for the value of what it can add to one’s CV. Thus, regarding competition in higher education Brennan writes, “Whether between institutions, between academics or between students, competition has tended to take over from collaboration as the key element of relationships” (2016, p.133).
Hence, in a culture of neoliberal competition and the marketization of higher education are the alternatives for a ‘politics of refusal’ becoming more narrow and blurred? Ball (2012b) speaks of these new paradigms and the implications these sharp turns toward marketization and competition hold for higher education and for the academics that teach and research within the academy. Although the tradition of higher education has evolved over the years, the recent course being journeyed has become more difficult to navigate for many academics in recent times. Ball (2012b) returning to the research of Shore and Wright (1999) argues, “One key and immediate facet of the new paradigm is the ‘the re-invention of professionals themselves as units of resource whose performance and productivity must constantly be audited so that it can be enhanced’ (Shore and Wright, 1999, p. 559 in Ball, 2012b, p. 18).

This brings me back to Kate and Jessie and our discussion of the annual evaluation with regard to the tenure process. Kate speaking of the annual evaluation and the tenure process goes on to share that although she refused to change the focus of her research, as suggested by her Dean to obtain large scale grants, Kate did indeed invest considerable hours and personal resources in gathering an externally informed portfolio as evidence that in the end did in fact garner Kate tenure. Thus, although Kate spoke of her moment of refusal with her Dean, it would appear that Kate herself lost her ability to navigate the neoliberal territory of higher education with regard to autonomy and the refusal of datafication as evidence. Or did Kate? This is something I came back to time and again, as Kate shares with me the importance of her autonomy as an academic and using datafication not as a method of compliance, but as a method that would allow her to continue her research, which she deems as conceptual,
I wanted to be able to prove that one can be promoted without big research grants. But, I did have to prove my worth and my value according to a set of criteria that one can say is quite narrow. I have a big problem with the emphasis on publishing only in the top-tiered scholarly journals, which are generally read by a very narrow and small group of people who work in a very narrow field that any one person works in as opposed to publishing in a practitioner journal, say a teacher professional journal, which may have more influence or impact on one’s work.

For my promotion I created a very extensive teaching portfolio, which included my teaching philosophy and evidence of my teaching philosophy in practice in terms of assessment, feedback from students on my teaching, in terms of pedagogical approaches that I use in my teaching. Feedback from students that they had given to me, courses that I developed or significantly revised. So, those options to demonstrate the quality of one’s teaching are to me much more holistic and present a clearer, more in-depth, and whole picture of one’s teaching than the student questionnaires.

Thus, the above points clearly to that which Ball (2001, 2003, 2012b) asserts with the help of others regarding the disciplines of performativity and the hollowing out of academic autonomy when he posits the dilemma such actions of resistance prove when he writes of the increasing amount of time that academics are required to commit in order to prove themselves valuable through the datafication of numbers. Ball (2012b) writes, Performativity- a powerful and insidious policy technology that is now at work at all levels and in all kinds of education and public service, a technology that links effort, values, purposes and self-understanding to measures and comparisons of output. Within the rigours and disciplines of performativity we are required to spend increasing amounts of our time in making ourselves accountable, reporting on what we do rather than doing it (p. 19).

When discussing the annual evaluation with Jessie and the current culture of work being performed at her faculty, Jessie speaks of work intensification and of a possible bias based on gender. I ask Jessie if there is any room to push back against this work
intensification and if she might elaborate? What Jessie shares is very honest and courageous. Speaking quietly as though afraid to be overheard Jessie begins,

    Well, the funny thing about that- so, no because the machine in
our faculty is moving forward baby! You either keep up or
you’re run over. For example, I went on sabbatical one year to
conduct research. I went on sabbatical and during my
sabbatical I was in an accident. I had an injury that required me
to be on a functional accommodation the following year. As a
result of my accommodation and not using my office that
much I lost my office. Hence, the reason why you see those
boxes there [indicating unpacked moving boxes in her office]-
this is my third or fourth office and it’s sort of like- if you are
off the pulse and not on that that treadmill you are pushed
aside.

I ask Jessie how this makes her feel having to move from office to office after being a
member for more than a decade with her faculty? Jessie giving an ironic laugh said,

    “Well, I mean I could say the paranoid side of me would think something like I don’t feel
valued. I feel hurt. But, I mean really- I am still publishing. I am still supervising Grad
students”.

I ask Jessie if the experience noted above caused her to be less inclined to engage
in a politics of refusal, Jessie responds, “Oh! Definitely, definitely! Definitely. There are
other situations where I have had to push back and it did not bode well for me. So, I
would say I would probably be a little bit shier”. Helen shares a similar sentiment also
regarding spaces of resistance or pushing back, even though having 25-years of
experience within her department. Helen, when discussing the possibility of her
department eliminating all criminology courses, a sub-unit within the department of
sociology that attracts an estimated 500 students, I ask Helen if she would elaborate. She
responds with the following,
But, you see if criminology were to implode, which it might, here, then there would be left potentially, maybe, two or three hundred students for all of the sociology faculty. So, they would be, the administration I would think would be, I don’t know this, it’s just conjecture, but the administration would have to start thinking about how to streamline the sociology department. Two or three hundred students do not sustain all of the professors that are here in this department!

Sharing with Helen that this logic, while contradicting the neoliberal rationality, supports what has been documented by several studies that demonstrate the death of the humanities and some social sciences in the university, Helen continues by adding the following,

There are so many contradictions in this. I have not been able, nor has the Chair, to figure it out. But, what we are doing is just going along until there’s a change one way or another. And, there could be a change in lots of different ways. So, I’m just, as I have learned to do over the past twenty-five years, I just, well not as quietly sometimes, I’m what is it? I’m staying under the radar. I’m not standing up in the rice paddy! I’m under the radar. I don’t make waves!

I don’t understand it! I’ll probably talk more now, as in talking with you, in trying to understand it! Bottom line is that I have a pretty awesome job! I love my job! I’m very blessed to have it! Yes, I’ve worked hard but I still think of it as a blessing. And, I want to keep working. I’m, probably, one of those people that cannot imagine nor do I want to consider retirement. I would go stark raving mad! I would! I love working! I love creating courses that nobody, you know, has done before! Like, I’m thinking of creating a course on human trafficking. Such a huge issue in our society and if I do, that will probably be my last one!

Helen’s conversation illuminates an ethos shared directly and indirectly by each faculty member whether when discussing their annual evaluation, their sense of autonomy, datafication, or the phenomenon of publish, get grants, or perish, and this is that while academics themselves are adapting and finding new strategies to navigate in a non-traditional manner within the belly of the beast, there are those who also are adopting
what “Seligman (1972) called [the] phenomenon of ‘learned helplessness’, by which he means that people no longer try to escape from what they perceive to be negative situations, because the past has taught them that they are powerless to change such events” (Seligman, 1972 in Norton, 2016, p.156).

Yet, the resilience, passion, and commitment that each faculty member expresses leads me to question Seligman’s concept of ‘learned helplessness’ and the need to look more deeply into notions of adaptation and strategy for future research. When referring to the concept of adaptation, what this might mean to spaces for autonomy and refusal, in a time of neoliberal rationality of higher education I turn to the work of Sen (2006), who draws from the work of Smith, Mills, Wollstonecraft and Marx. Sen (2006) looks to the experience of freedom of will and adaptability by faculty members in higher education, when researching autonomy and the alternatives available for faculty members within the university system in the UK. Sen (2006) writes,

And yet, I argued, there is a further problem of ‘autonomy’, which is not that of autonomy of ‘choosing an alternative from a menu’, but among the valuations and preferences. If we attach some value to retaining the freedom to take one of several different views (or of changing one’s mind), it is not just a question (as Arrow seems to see it) of whether right now ‘he or she knows his or her preference’. It is one of retaining some room also for volitional change of priorities and preferences (p. 95).

Thus, a politics of possibility and change does exist that “moves forward with the knowledge, skills, and social relations necessary for the creation of new modes of agency, social movements, and democratic economic and social policies” (Giroux, 2014, p.204). This then brings me to my final research finding of importance regarding the experience of faculty members in higher education, quality assurance and accountability, as framed through the neoliberal rationality and the intensification of publish or perish.
The Intensification of Publish or Perish

While ‘publish or perish’ is not a new phenomenon within the culture of the university, it is posited that the shift-taking place in higher education, from that of the Humboldtian concept of the interconnection between research and teaching, must be viewed in the context of the current neoliberal rationality that captivates global governments and universities alike. As the massification of higher education takes place, increasing of tuition fees, decreasing government support and resources, and comparative global rankings that now place increasing pressures on universities, university departments, and individual faculty members to focus less on research as an endeavour that lends value to their teaching and students’ learning; it creates a focus on research as an economic asset for career advancement and the attainment of large scale grants that off load larger government responsibility. Thus, the research culture that we in the university find ourselves placed in is one, which has “heightened expectations for social science researchers to secure grant funding at the same time that such funding appears to be more competitive than ever” (McGinn, Acker, Vander Kloet & Wagner, 2019, paragraph 1).

Therefore, the final section of this chapter creates a focus on the experience of faculty members and the emerging phenomenon of publish, get grants, or perish. In their research on higher education and the connection between research and teaching Jenkins and Healey (2016) create a brief but informative comparative analysis on the marketization of higher education and how this is changing our “understandings, practices and policies to enhance the link between teaching and research” (p. 164). Each faculty member interviewed for this study spoke of these changes regarding which research is valued, which research is not deemed valuable, the increasing pressures to
publish in top-ranking peer reviewed journals, the increasing competitive nature of publishing so to achieve promotion and attract grants, and the current competitive culture regarding the intensification for the attainment of large scale grants that once again, become a part of their and their graduate students career advancement process. All of which lead McGinn et al., (2019) to write, “Dear SSHRC, ….We are immensely grateful for the support…But the process of applying for funding is too much like an endurance test or a guessing game” (4.8 Commentary, paragraph one).

When discussing academic research both Kate and Jessie, who come from the field of education, speak of the value of publishing in professional magazines in addition to academic journals. Both Kate and Jessie having published in professional magazines of Education, assert that this research, when it was published represented some of their proudest moments as educators for the impact it has on knowledge mobilization among those in the teaching profession, suggesting it has the potential to reach a far broader readership than research that is published in high-ranking journals that are read by a select and narrow group. Regarding the hierarchy in publishing, Kate starts by first commenting on just how entrenched publishing research in academia has become in association with quantified measures of what is deemed as quality in higher education and her annual evaluation,

So, my annual evaluation is very *quantified*- it’s *very* quantified. With research, it is also *quantified*. So, if you have a certain number of journal publications, you get a certain number of ‘ticks’ on your annual evaluation. If you have a book chapter you get one ‘tick’. Publications that are *valued* the most under this system of evaluation are journal publications in high-tiered scholarly journals. The highest tiered scholarly journals are those, which we call the highest journal *impact factor* and those are based on citation rates and acceptance rates for those journals.
Jessie’s experience echoes Kate’s statement above when sharing with me the pressure she experienced to publish in top-tiered journals versus that of professional magazines while also expressing concerns over the current state of work intensification. I ask Jessie whether professional magazines in the field of education are valued and she makes a hand signal of zero. When I question Jessie why research published in professional magazines on education are not considered of value in her annual evaluation, Jessie goes on to state,

Yes, but for *reach*- you want to talk about *reach* and *usefulness of professional magazines in education*! Professional magazines probably reach more education practitioners and are more *useful* than the piece of research I wrote that is not allowed to be open access and has had five downloads in the last five years although it might be in a top tiered journal. Big, frigging, whoop-da-doo! You know!

I then ask Jessie if she finds this challenging as a researcher and an educator? Jessie replies, “Yes! So, that is the challenge; but that’s also the *reward*. I think the challenge *right* now is that *we* are in a state of work *intensification* and it’s promoted for us to do *more, and to do more, with fewer resources*. The question of the legitimacy of research and the preference of certain types of research is something, which Norton (2016) addresses when she writes,

Pedagogical research in its widest sense could be used as a defense against overt marketisation of higher education, where empirical evidence might show deleterious effects of the current policies being enacted. An example of this might be the negative effect of large classes (see Gibbs, 2010), but either enough research has not yet been done to influence policy, or it has been ignored (p.157).
When considering research as a defense against overt marketisation in higher education I am reminded of one participant who is set to retire at the time of this study with 30 years of pedagogical experience. When discussing the annual evaluation Isabeau shares that she has always been a “good citizen” and thus never worried about her annual evaluation. When discussing the intensification of publishing and achieving large-scale-grants Isabeau shares how the criteria for publishing at her university is dependent on the context of each individual’s department, stating that one department chair requires academics who wish to be considered for the tenure process to publish five peer reviewed articles each year with one article being published in a top-tier journal within their field. This leads Isabeau to comment on her experience regarding quality assurance and the changing culture of publish or perish when reflecting on being first hired at her university, the lack of concern for the metrics of publishing, and how publishing means more than a metric,

So, the individual who hired me at the university was introducing me to a lot of the people that she had on the board. So, there was an historian, there was a philosopher, there was a psychologist and then there was one person she pointed to and she said to me that this person has been teaching for twenty-years and the only thing they have ever produced is a book. I thought to myself, “Oh my god, I don’t want to be that!” And, it was her dissertation! I don’t want that!

So, I was actually very interested in my own projects anyway. So, I researched and published one or two articles a year until I became a full-professor. Then I would take my time with my research. I started to do more reflective research, rather than “field work” as you called it. I’m not hugely into that- Like, I have a friend who’s CV must have three or four hundred articles!

When I ask Isabeau if she might explain the current emphasis that universities are placing on publishing, Isabeau begins to shed light on the intensification of work and the competition
of the publish, get grants, or perish phenomenon, stating the following with regard to the
decreasing public funding of Canadian universities,

I don’t see that it’s the university’s choice anymore. There are
two things I think that are important: One, are the number of
PhD’s that are now graduating from our universities. So, due to
the rising numbers of graduate students, the competition in our
universities has become vicious. So, of course there are a lot of
graduate students who are going to place an emphasis on their
ability to be publishing the most number of articles and they
are the ones going to get the jobs.

But, I think that there are also idiot premiers who create things
like accountability in the university presented as a public crisis
in our province, who treat the university as if we are a
business, and treat the university the way that a business is run-
to see the production, the most production- knowledge as
numbers. Which leads you into the neoliberal stupidity!

I ask Isabeau if she might share her understanding of the intensification of publishing and
how this relates to quality assurance in higher education? Isabeau responds with the
following,

Well, you know we do still have tenure in the university. So, I
have known young colleagues who work like hell until they get
tenure then don’t do anything after this achievement. And, then
there are other’s who are actually really interested in their jobs.

I have a friend who is now retired; she was two-years ahead of
me in our PhD program. She is a meticulous field researcher
and slow writer. But, she wrote and she was getting better and
better as she wrote. Anyway, she eventually ended up at this
university and then she married and moved on. She went to a
university out of country and then ended back at this
University. I have known her for forty-five years and she has
cancer. She is dying; she’s finished. There is nothing they can
do. So, she is just biding her time. She just finished another
book! When I saw her last she said to me, “I have one more
book in me!” And, I thought wow! If you are even alive next
month you will be lucky.
It is this passion that numbers cannot capture, that metrics fail to grasp; whereby standardization in education reduces all that is human from a human endeavour. This also brings me to reflect on the writing of Ayn Rand (1964), in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, where Rand posits the idea of a *demanding pleasure*. A demanding pleasure Rand explains is “[a] pleasure that demands the use of one’s mind; not in the sense of problem solving, but in the sense of exercising discrimination, judgement, awareness” (1964, p.76). Thus, as one interviewee shares, ego is not the driver in the work that they publish; it is in taking pride in the quality of one’s research work that they publish.

Alexander, also a professor within the field of education, shares a very interesting perspective regarding the quality of one’s research, the significance of top-tiered journals, the importance of readership and ego. Alexander, who publishes only in top-tiered journals shares with me that he himself has been accused of being seduced by the neoliberal rationality in academia due to his position that as scholars we should only be aiming to publish in top-tiered journals, stating that this is not about ego; Alexander comments that having our research published in top-tiered journals is testimony to the quality of our research and a responsibility to those who have given of their time and their stories to enrich our research. Alexander when speaking of the importance of publishing in top-tier journals suggests the following,

> But, it also matters where you publish your research. It matters where you publish your research because it is about standards and I think that standards are important; but not standards in a neoliberal sense.

So, I was accused of being *neo-liberally driven* because I was saying to colleagues and students that there are journals that have different standards from other journals and in that sense have become more *highlighted*, and this is part of it, of
neoliberalism, it is true, it is the datafication in the context of creating an emphasis on journal rankings.

This then contrasts, yet supports, that which Brennan (2016) argues as challenges in higher education that are brought about by the accelerated culture of marketisation and competition that is often framed through the pursuit of quality assurance. When discussing the shift in research, Brennan (2016) remarks that the importance of one’s research is no longer that of generating new knowledge or sharing of knowledge, but simply for the value of what one’ can add to one’s CV furthering the significance of datafication. However, for Alexander publishing in top-tier journals is not about his CV but rather is about the standard of one’s research and sharing of knowledge.

Alexander goes on to explain his position regarding the complexities involved in publishing in top-tiered journals further while also stressing the importance of the rigorous criteria involved in having one’s research accepted to a peer-reviewed journal as to assure the quality of one’s work that moves beyond purely producing work for the purposes of career advancement when he says,

But, I do think that there are some journals that are better than others and how you look at it is to look at who has published in them. In getting to the Thomas Routers Social Citations Index you do have to meet certain requirements. That does not make me feel uncomfortable. There is a certain expectation in terms of reviewing the research submitted. There are not a lot of papers that get accepted to top-tier journals, and nor should they. You can’t just expect this- there is a number of criteria in publishing that I don’t think have been consistent with what I always understood about peer reviewing.

Further to this Alexander shares how this new culture of publish, get grants, or perish has become quite complicated due to the neoliberal rationality and the intensification of marketisation that now is the new normal for in higher education. When speaking of these
complications Alexander shares the following concerning research for public good versus research as an economic register,

You can’t just *produce* research, as one of my former colleagues has *done*, who gets up in the *media* all over the place, whereby I am *horrified* at some of the *statements* that were made. In *fact* this person has only ever received *one* SSHRC grant! All of the *other grants* were *conference* related and *symposium* related. So, when you look at the issues of grants more closely you have to begin to wonder how can someone *get promoted*? It possibly sounds like I might have a chip on my shoulder *but* it is really a *part* of the level of *governance*! So, it is *complicated*.

On some levels there is an *increased monitoring* taking place in the university. There is an *increased* emphasis on journal *rankings* and *university rankings*. So, I am more conscious *now* than I was ever before in my career. Am I going to publish in *that* journal, which isn’t included in the citations index? *Why* would I when so much of my *time* and *effort* goes into my work? Am I *interested* in marketing myself? No! But, I am interested in my work being *disseminated* and for those voices in my research being *heard* and having legitimacy.

The above conversations on the current pressure to publish return me to the work of Wendy Brown (2015) who when discussing the economic and cultural shift taking place in higher education argues how the current system ranks universities that are supported through “the dismal contemporary economics of higher education [that] itself exert[s] enormous pressures on colleges and universities and especially on liberal arts curriculums to abandon all aims and ends other than making students [and I might add faculty member] “shovel ready” (p. 192). However, it is in interviewing each faculty member regarding the pressures of publishing that the phenomenon of the pressure of achieving large-scale grants emerges a phenomenon that has not received very much attention in current research. Acker and Wagner (2017), researching the work of feminist scholars in
the university and neoliberalism, borrow from Blackmore (2014), when commenting on the pressures of publishing and achieving grants, when they report,

What seemed to disturb [our research] participants even more than the work of continually applying for funding was the sense that the funding bodies had excess power over what were acceptable topics and styles of research. Participants believed that they had to direct research projects into areas that government and policy makers would deem useful, adopting market based terminology, while simultaneously downplaying the significance of gender, race and other social justice issues (Acker & Wagner, 2017, p.12).

When discussing large scale research grants, such as the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant, Kate shares with me that large-scale grants were never required by her due to her type of research, which is conceptual in nature. Kate comments that the emphasis for large-scale grants became problematic for her,

Well, that was a real problem for me. Much of the research I do is policy analysis, documentary analysis, and theoretical and conceptual work. In fact my contribution to my field in education is primarily in terms of theory, and conceptual work, and pushing the field to think differently. Pushing people who work in the field to think differently about how we do our research. And, I don’t need big grants to do that kind of work. Some of the other research that I have done I require small grants to employ my research assistants to work with me, that are really funded through the faculty anyways. But, big external grants- I don’t need that.

Furthermore, Kate then goes on to share that not having required unnecessary large-scale grants hindered the tenure process for her despite her countless publications in the form of books, professional journals, top-tier peer review journals, and an impeccable history of teaching. Kate comments,
There is a committee at our Faculty that each year goes through everybody’s file and they pick out those people who they think are ready to go up for promotion. And, if the committee, which is basically led by the Dean, believes that you are at a position where you are likely to be promoted they will recommend that you submit your file for promotion. That’s all the materials that you need for promotion. So, it’s a step you go through. And, last year the Dean told me that I was not ready to be promoted because I didn’t have any external research grants.

I commented to Kate that this must have been a difficult experience considering the years and record of scholarly work and Kate shared with me the experience of a research project, which while achieved more than a decade ago, still brings her great professional satisfaction and pride. This scholarly research while being of immense impact, Kate suggests, held no value for her tenure process, as it cannot be quantified,

I would have to say the work that I’m actually the most proud of is a project I did over ten-years ago. One of the strands of my research has been Global Citizenship Education and it was a collaborative project with the local school board. … It was distributed to hundreds upon hundreds of teachers who are using that curriculum in the classroom. That work has made, as far as I am concerned, much more of a significant impact, educational impact, than any of my journal articles, I would think. It’s a different kind of impact I would say. But, it’s simply not valued in the same way by the annual evaluations at my faculty. There are no citations, there’s no impact factor. So, it’s hard to quantify that impact.

I am reminded of Kierkegaard when writing of the “Problem” when he states, “in truth no age has fallen victim to the comic as this has, and it is incomprehensible that this age has not already by a generatio aequivoca given birth to its hero, the demon who would remorselessly produce the dreadful spectacle of making the whole age laugh and making it forget it was laughing at itself” (1941/2013, p. 184). Acker and Wagner (2017) speak to the preoccupation of misplaced value of “measurement” in the university share their
findings from participants located within universities in the UK, who reported, “On the need to measure outcomes, show impact and publish results. As Valerie [one participant] stated ‘everything seems to have to be measured or it doesn’t exist” (p.14). One other participant in Acker & Wagner’s (2027) study, also from, the UK noted, “ that quality could be compromised by the prevailing over-emphasis on outputs” (p.14). Thus, as numerical data increasingly takes precedence regarding the assessment of the quality and the value of scholarship in higher education, we must begin to realize that we are in a situation in academia that demands we look at these past decades and ask how did we get here and where are we to go?

Yet, while it may very well be that we are in an age that has fallen victim to the comic, there are those who use numerical data, their record of top-tier publishing, and their prowess for achieving large-scale grants as a shield against the neoliberal driven agenda of higher education. Laughing, at how datafication allows them to affect change in education that continues to be critically and equitably driven, Alexander, a tenured professor, shares with me that despite his Deans’ removal of him from teaching at the level of a graduate mandatory course due to three students’ objections, that it is his quantified record of scholarship and attainment of large-scale grants that disturbingly protects his professional position as an educator and researcher,

Have you seen the recent article published by my faculty? This article is disturbing to me! The article was about citations! How a colleague and I have the highest “Google Scholar” citations and this is my Dean stating this! So, on one level she wants to be able to acknowledge my research? It is so complicated! It is not that I dislike my Dean. I do like my Dean as a person. I don’t agree with the governance side of things in my faculty and it is trying to get at that -I think that the Dean does understand that, yes, this is a research-intensive
university. But, the Dean also knows, because I know, what the pressures from the top-down are.

There is so much to unpack regarding the assessment of quality research in a university. Is research valued for the contribution it provides our public? Or, is the real value of research now considered only for the economic value it provides university departments through monetary funding of large-scale grants and the number of times a project receives citations, thus promoting certain universities? Regarding these questions Jessie furthers this discussion on funding when she suggests that her understanding is that her faculty is on a “different funding model than the rest of the University” due to the fact that although her faculty was at one time in threat of closure it now “actually makes money that goes into our operating funds to keep the lights on”.

However, Jessie also shares concerns regarding the current culture of research when she tells me sighing aloud, “My worry, is that research around education is in some way being lost. It is about being a service provider and it’s the notion now that we have to find funding to keep our operations going. That it’s becoming a business”. Jessie expanding further on her thoughts regarding the neoliberal rationality that now pervades the university has this to say,

Okay, for me how I understand university, and maybe how I had hoped it would be, is that universities are, I’m going to use some neoliberal words here, that they are generators of knowledge and that knowledge can contribute to the economy. Don’t get me wrong with that. But, universities may not necessarily respond to supply and demand issues right now in the current economy or economies. It could be that some of the knowledge produced in universities is counter intuitive. It could be that it might be unpopular. It could challenge some existing theories and understandings and some practices that exist out there. For instance, climate change!
If we were to understand certain policy groups, researchers would not be funded or would not do research around climate change. You know twenty-years ago climate change was unpopular. So, I think higher education is the place where there is this generating of knowledge and information. That research and data generated can be independent and separate and have the ability to challenge and think outside the box. That’s why sometimes I am a little worried about the focus of SSHRC and CIHR grants as it sometimes drives research that’s needed for right now when we should actually be doing research that’s needed for later on, but we don’t know it yet. But, somebody would be doing it because they had time; they have had the freedom and they have had the support to continue that research.

Berg and Seeber (2015) speak of the depleting resource of time in academia, “Alongside privileging certain forms of knowledge above others, corporatization has engendered a race against time with important consequences for the quality of our working lives and the quality of our scholarship” (p. 54). Thus, while Jessie shares that she has brought millions of dollars to her faculty in the form of large-scale grants it is the resource of time that Jessie and other faculty members in this study express a wish for. Yet, while Berg and Seeber (2015) acknowledge the want for the resource of time in one’s research they state that it is not a need that the infrastructure of most university departments can fulfill.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the experiences of six faculty members, from different universities in South Western Ontario, Canada. While each university has a different history, each faculty member shares, at times, a similar story regarding the assessment of quality assurance and accountability, datafication and a politics of refusal, and academic entrepreneurship. Also, of importance is that while each interviewee spoke at length of
quality assurance and accountability, the Strategic Mandate Agreement that has been entered into by each of the public universities in Ontario was not mentioned.

Each interviewee expressed the importance of quality and accountability in the work that they do in the university. However, each interviewee also shared that while quality assurance and accountability within the university is deemed an internal and external concern, each participant suggested that for them the quality of their work and the accountability they feel toward that work is their personal responsibility. The following quote by Kate becomes my closing point for this chapter as it truly set the tone for what unfolded with each interview. When Kate is asked if there were anything else she would like to add before ending our interview she eloquently responded that, which each interviewee shared in ethos regarding the changing culture of higher education, their love for what they do professionally, and that, which is missing when measures for quality assurance only count that which can be counted,

One can’t do well what one is expected to do as a faculty member in a higher education institution without loving what one does and I think that is a tremendous loss. I think that historical comparisons allow us to see what we can’t see today. What was taken for granted in the past is completely absent from current discourses on quality assurance today- Love, passion for what one does, joy- All of those things! Those words are never used in any of the documents around ‘Quality Assurance’ and that is very sad. That makes me very sad when I think of the work that I do in academia. So, I’m going to end on that note! Because I think it is an important one.

Therefore when summarizing the research findings presented in this chapter regarding quality assurance, accountability, the pressures and concerns of the yearly assessment and that of achieving large scale grants and publishing, I return once more to the research of Acker & Wagner (2017) for the following reflects my own research findings presented
when they state that “Forms of accountability that oversimplified and over-measured accomplishments were also seen as an unpleasant feature of contemporary university life. These trends were regarded as resulting in a range of consequences, mostly negative” (p. 15). Many questions remain for me regarding the neoliberal rationality of higher education. Questions such as had not the Dean from one department taken a neoliberal approach to the management of their department it is quite possible that this department would no longer exist and yet if not for the critical engagement and ability of certain faculty members in this department, regarding their research endeavours and ability to achieve large-scale grants would this department exist. Thus, as Torres (2011) writes,

> A word of caution is in order here because speaking of traditional roles of higher education may be misleading. There is no question that higher education, and particularly universities have a plurality of traditional roles and functions in society, but these roles and functions are constantly reshaped by the transformation of the global, national and social contexts in which the university operates (p. 178).

Though education is stated to matter in the province of Ontario, under the newly appointed Conservative government in 2018 there is an “imposed freeze” (Breznitz and Munro, 2020). Furthermore, Alex Usher a consultant on higher education notes that the underfunding of higher education has come at the cost of our social sciences, arts, and liberal art programs in the university in the advance of programs with higher tuition fees such as those in the disciplines of engineering, math, and technology (Brezninits and Munro, 2020).

This then leads to my research findings on leadership in higher education. In the past four decades there has been an increasing focus on leadership and leadership studies in universities. COVID-19 presents new challenges for higher education, challenges
unanticipated at the time of this research. In facing these new challenges in the university, this next chapter attempts to unpack, yet connect, what is often viewed as a bi-polar relationship between administrators and faculty members in the university, as understandings of what the purpose of a university is to mean regarding economics versus a public good.
Chapter 6:

Findings – Administrators

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the voice of three senior administrators from different departments and different universities located in South-Western Ontario, Canada. Each of the administrators interviewed for this study reveal similar experiences and thoughts as leaders in their university. Yet, each interviewee also conveyed varied experiences and philosophies regarding leadership, quality assurance, and accountability in the university. While several themes from each interview with each administrator come to light, the following three themes emerge as significant to the professional experiences shared by each regarding quality assurance and accountability in the university. Hence, the following three themes are: 1) Public Universities as Democratic Institutions; 2) Quality Assurance & Accountability: The Changing Culture of the University; and 3) Leadership and Gender.

The word ‘accountability’ has become a ‘buzzword’ in higher education policy, where according to recent research the word ‘accountability’ has “increased tenfold in studies between 1965 and 2000” (Dubnick, 2014 in Smith and Benavot, 2019, p. 193). Thus, the findings of this chapter create a focus on quality assurance, accountability, and neoliberalism and how each have come to shape the professional experiences of the three administrators as documented in this case study. Debates surrounding the rise of new public management and/or new managerialism in the university abound. Rosemary Deem (2008) writing on this topic suggests that the “roots of new managerialism lay in the
1980s cuts in expenditure, the introduction of quasi-markets to public services, and examination of the so-called producer-dominance of public services organizations, as part of a more general shift to neoliberalism in many Western societies” (p. 257). Deem (2008) states that the term ‘new public management’ and ‘new managerialism’ are often conflated and though some of their characteristics are related, each is actually quite distinct.

Explaining this distinction Deem suggests that new public management (NPM) derives from “theories on public choice” (2008, p. 258). Further she argues that NPM is viewed as a form of modern enlightenment, as an ideology, that supports the contemporary governance of public institutions whereas new managerialism is much more audacious in practice. New managerialism, Deem asserts, “represents a way of trying to understand and categorise attempts to impose managerial techniques, more usually associated with medium and large ‘for profit’ businesses, onto public sector and voluntary organisations (Reed & Anthony, 1993; Clarke et al., 1994; Clarke & Newman, 1994, 1997b; Itzen & Newman, 1995 in Deem, 1998, p. 49). In an earlier study on new managerialism in the UK that creates a focus on the university, Deem (1998) documents a shift in the university culture from that of universities being “perceived as communities of scholars researching and teaching together in collegial ways; [when] those running universities were regarded as academic leaders rather than as managers or chief executives” (p. 47).

Roger Brown (2018) argues that neoliberalism, which now permeates higher education, has resulted in a series of policies in higher education that suggest that the current objective of the university is to advance “economic performance, and that
considers that the most valuable outcomes of higher education are exploitable knowledge and credentialled graduates” (p. 9). Brown (2018) also argues that measures of accountability based on neoliberalism are pushing administrators of universities to strive for rankings at the cost of quality and equity. As policy discourse and the mechanisms for assuring quality and accountability become increasingly externally driven, they have simultaneously created questions of public trust. While mechanisms for outcome based measures seek to improve the ‘value’ of a university education they continue to be questioned as those who caution that the current path is misguided and may undermine the pursuit of a critical-democratic citizenry (Giroux, 2020; Brown, 2019; Portelli & Konecny, 2013).

Public Universities as Democratic Institutions

The changing culture of the university is both complex and complicated as government expectations focus on economic outcomes often at the expense of fostering democratic citizenry and critical engagement. Universities are a space where those who are critically minded and creative strive to find strategies to push, at times subtly, against neoliberalism. The interviews conducted with each administrator present a tension between new public management and being critically minded and creative in this newest wave of the neoliberal rationality. Deem (1998) in her prophetic research based on the changing culture in higher education brought about by new public management in the UK says that the growing tension between being an academic leader versus an academic manager has created a “kind of bilingualism, whereby two or more sets of values and cultures exist side by side and are invoked in appropriate contexts” (Gewirtz et al, 1995 in Deem, 1998, p.50). Gareth Williams (2016) argues that university “systems are
networks of able, intelligent creative and critical thinking people so it is not surprising that they interpret what they do in different ways” (p. 202).

When I spoke with Elizabeth about leadership and the value of public universities she spoke of the crucial role that public universities hold with regard to democracy, and how public universities must honour society’s expectations and embrace their privilege in upholding this very important role,

Public universities are crucial for democracy and so part of the social contract should be us trying to be really honourable with the money we have and trying to provide a really good quality suite of programs for students. So, there’s that part to it. It is a value led position for me! The value of public education is crucial for democracy. If we, in the university, are going to have that privilege then we have to in turn honour our society that is sponsoring all of this. Which is less and less of course (voice begins to whisper) with the provincial governments that are forcing us into partnerships and forcing fundraising into Alumni events.

Wendy Brown (2019) in the opening chapter of her book *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* writes of democracy, equality, and the social. Researching the etymology of the word “democracy” Brown suggests that it can be traced back to the ancient Greek words “demos (the people) and kratos (power or rule)” (p. 23). Brown also asserts that the bedrock of democracy is the ideal of achieving political equality, arguing that this ideal while never complete has been, by degrees, unraveling progressively in recent times.

Elizabeth speaks of the incomplete ideal of democracy, the purposes of public education, and the philosophy of Maxine Greene when she expresses the following regarding critical- democratic freedoms,

*Democracies* I do think are obviously flawed and limited and imperfect. But, probably as good as we can imagine for now. And, the public purposes of education, that I follow, are the things that Maxine Greene uses to argue - *Freedom*, freedom to
be your best, freedom to think, freedom to contest, freedom to explore and not be burdened by somebody insisting that they understand something in some particular way.

Speaking with Claire of democracy and the role of a public university I ask Claire if she could expand on questions regarding the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusivity in the university. Much of what Claire has to say echoes the Universities Canada report entitled *Equity, diversity and inclusion at Canadian universities* (2019).

When discussing with Claire the purpose of public universities, I ask Claire if she believes if universities support the mission of critical-democratic thinking, equity, and diversity? Claire replies saying the following regarding anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and Transphobia,

I would *argue* that we would like to think that we *are*. We are also *trying* our very best to focus on issues that are important to us, such as *equity, diversity and inclusion*. So, what are we doing to deal with anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and Transphobia on our campuses? What *are* we *doing* to ensure that we are recruiting students from these diverse groups?

How are we ensuring that as students enter their academic programs that a *racialized* student is going to have the same opportunities as a *White* student? *How* are we dealing with ensuring that all of our employees actually understand that *equity, diversity and inclusion* are *major, major components, major issues* for this institution as we move forward? It doesn’t matter what your role is. *How* do we *manage* that? We’re *not* there yet. We still have a long way to go. The role of public universities is really focused on, *for me*, those key aspects. For some of my vice-presidential *colleagues* their focus might be slightly different, their focus would be *different*.

Each of the questions raised by Claire is centrally important to the democratic mission of Canadian public universities not only for the recruitment of students, the learning culture provided, the recruitment and retention of faculty and administration; it is also centrally
important to equity, diversity and inclusion and what this implies to fostering a critical-democratic culture in the university. Portelli and Konecny (2013) in their research on democracy and education speak to this in the following,

One of the central litmus tests of any model for democracy is how it deals with differences. While the authoritarian crushes disagreements and differences and the soft liberal puts disagreements aside (as he or she believes they are all fine, as long as they do not interfere with the rights of the individual), the genuine democrat acknowledges the differences, does not shy away from disagreements, and rather than crushing or hiding disagreements, engages meaningfully with them (p. 90).

For the 2019 national report *Equity, diversity and inclusion at Canadian universities* (Universities Canada, 2019), university presidents were asked their perspective regarding their university’s internal difficulties in implementing, in a meaningful way, policies for equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) so to attract and support faculty and staff. Each university president sited “lack of resources (financial, human, material and temporal)” (Universities Canada, 2019, p. 30). University presidents were also asked what external difficulties in implementing EDI might be? Each president, once again, states diminishing funding along with “structural or cultural barriers within society” (Universities Canada, 2019, p. 30). Each also expressed concern regarding the impact that the lack of funding has for educating staff on how to promote, convey and uphold the EDI policies and how the lack of resources impedes their ability in attracting diverse groups of quality and qualified faculty due to increased competition between institutions, which the report states has a direct effect on Canada’s indigenous populations (Universities Canada, 2019). Thus, the Strategic Mandate Agreement (2017-2021), which creates a focus on economic outcomes and performance based funding,
holds specific implications regarding “structural or cultural barriers”, equity, the fostering of critical-democratic citizenry and the purpose of the public university.

The purpose of universities as public institutions, as arbiters of democracy, and the significance of equity is something that Elizabeth expands on when speaking of the importance of good leadership, ‘freedom’, and the purpose of Canadian public universities; including their challenges and their ultimate goal. Thus, Elizabeth has the following to say,

So, those purposes, those freedoms, are things that I’ve enjoyed, you have enjoyed, all sorts of people have enjoyed. It is getting harder for some members of societies, some members of Canadian societies, to have that because of their history as marginalized groups, particularly Indigenous Canadians, the level of poverty there is just an outrage.

So, indigenous in Canada have many more barriers. But, the ultimate goal of public education should be for people to be able to learn about themselves, learn how to exist with others, learn how to hear different points of view, learn certain things that will allow them to have more freedom.

What Elizabeth shares above, regarding ‘freedom’ raises questions as to what might be understood by the term ‘freedom’ and how ‘freedom’ might differ from our understandings of ‘liberation’ in a critical-democracy. Thus, while it is important to take a stance against dominant ideological assumptions that wear thin the democratic purpose of the public university; it is equally important to critically engage with how ‘freedom’ is understood, translated, and justified within the context of neoliberalism.

Gale and Densmore (2003) in their study on democratic educational leadership state, “We believe that democratic leaders enable formation of social, learning and culturally responsive public educational institutions, in part by enabling contextually-specific struggles to determine what is needed, and by developing a politically-informed
commitment to justice for all” (p. 120). Elizabeth speaking of ‘being-politically informed’ raises concerns as a senior leader regarding neoliberalism and what neoliberalism means to a public university education,

Neoliberalism is a threat to the public purposes of education at every level. I’d love to know the origins of it. To work out who created this great idea. It’s certainly a politically conservative position and it’s a position that basically I think is smoke and mirrors. Neoliberalism is a position to get people to do more for less; and, to actually shift resources from the public arena into private interest. So, occasionally when I’ve heard here at this university, sometimes, people, not many, but some notable figures encourage us to consider becoming a private university (gives an expression of great incredulousness), I have thought to myself what!

Raewyn Connell (2019) writing of universities as privilege machines raises concern regarding the role of the public university and questions if universities can function as democratic institutions when she suggests, “universities are not, generally speaking, noted for their democratic ways. Individual departments can be pocket-sized tyrannies; income inequalities within universities are growing; hierarchies of rank and authority are usual” (pp. 112-13). Thus, if inequalities are growing in universities how exactly can universities authentically promote critical-democratic thinking and practice? And, what are the implications of this regarding the future of learning, teaching, research and a democratic citizenry?

Connell, who began her activist-democratic experiences circa 1960s, in her most recent book about the work that takes place in universities, a book which took Connell more than seven years to complete, questions the changing value of the university in broader society. Each historical and current comparative study that Connell shares is a gift worthy of consulting. Connell in her timely and comprehensive book titled The Good
University (2019) states “we need to look closer to the ground” (p. 55) suggesting that to “understand universities we need to understand the workforce who do this labour, who are collectively the modern intellectual” (p. 55). Michael Peters (2017), concerned with the transforming values of education, the autonomy of educators in an era of ‘post-truth’, and what this implies for a ‘participatory democracy’, writes,

Criticality has been avoided or limited within education and substituted by narrow conceptions of standards, and state-mandated instrumental and utilitarian pedagogies. There have been attacks on the professional autonomy of teachers as arbiters of truth. If education is equated solely with job training rather than a broader critical citizenship agenda for participatory democracy, we can expect further decline of social democracy (p. 565).

Writing of the erosion of democracy, the renewal of elitism in public universities, the importance of liberal art studies, which now appear reserved for the elite, and studies that are being eclipsed by university programs that demonstrate purely economic outcomes, Wendy Brown (2015) cautions of the neoliberal rationality that “has steered faculty from forms of association, knowledge, and teaching that serve the public good, defined either as developing thoughtful citizens or as research oriented toward solving public problems” (p. 195), which leads Brown to say when interviewed in 2017 that it is here “where thinking about neoliberalism as a governing rationality switches the meaning of democratic values from a political to an economic register”. What is at stake in higher education then, is that if neoliberal policies continue to be left unchecked and absent of critical engagement, they will further tighten the tourniquet that presently exists in public higher education, a constriction that is fueling the erosion of democracy and the purpose of the public university.
This case study has endeavored to provide insight into how faculty members and administrators *practice* policy within the university setting in Ontario, Canada. The purpose of universities as public institutions, as arbiters of democracy, and the significance of equity is something that Elizabeth expanded on when speaking of the importance of good leadership, ‘freedom’, and the purpose of Canadian public universities; including their challenges and their ultimate goal. What Elizabeth shared leads one to question if the modern public university might err on their societal and cultural responsibility when considering understandings of democracy, liberation, citizenry, quality assurance, accountability, creativity, and critical engagement when viewed through the contemporary political and economic lens of neoliberalism?

Portelli and Konecny (2013) writing of the role of democracy, education, and how democracy is practiced remind us that the significance of “democracy as an educational ideal means that we believe the struggle to achieve democracy and the beliefs, conditions, *and* [my emphasis] practices that go along with it is worthwhile” (p. 93). Furthermore, Portelli and Konecny (2013) caution that “the neoliberal hegemony of contemporary North American schooling is oppressive insofar as it negates and stifles any effort to enact democratic practices within classroom settings, while simultaneously producing dehumanization, and instrumentalization of teachers and students in schools” (p. 87). Thus, education policies that are imbued with neoliberal logic are slowly, numbingly, extinguishing our value for a critical democratic education, an educational system that in Ontario is said to seek to embrace an authentic democratic culture of equity, diversity, and inclusion. This then leads to the following section that will discuss the case findings.
Quality Assurance & Accountability: The changing Culture of the University

Over the past 40 years there has been a substantial increase in the internationalization and marketization of higher education. This increase in internationalization and marketization in higher education has led to the establishment of greater external quality assurance and accountability measures that now connect to external funding partners, at the cost of the de-funding of Canadian public universities by governments. As private funding partnerships and the internationalization of higher education assist governments in offsetting public support of university teaching and research, it is forcing universities toward a system of privatization under the veil of quality assurance and accountability. In a report published by the World Bank (2009) on higher education and accountability regimes, it is suggested that top-down accountability measures, once resisted by many universities in the global North, are now embraced as many universities perceive these top-down measures as necessary for achieving “transparency and accountability in their operations” (p. vi).

Accountability measures in the university are said to have increased in recent years to address the need of greater student access, which the World Bank (2009) claims is demonstrative of equity, are required to improve the quality of teaching and research, help to transition university graduates into applicable labour-ready individuals, simultaneously subsidizing economic development, while transmitting the ideals of global citizenship all in a way that shows fiscal accountability and stability. Thus, universities and those in positions of leadership now must court the requests of those with
multiple interests, and at time conflicting plans, regarding quality assurance and accountability of a public university.

Writing of senior administrators and accountability in the university, Connell (2019) argues how the growth in accountability regimes now requires university faculty to demonstrate conformity and performativity to their department administration. In addition, administrators in the university are now required to demonstrate their conformity and performativity based on a set of metrics established by government and third party organizations. The consequence, Connell argues, is an astonishing expansion of “fake accountability, where an appearance of compliance and good performance is created” (2019, p.132). Regarding the notion of “fake accountability” academic Julie Rowlands (2012) in her study on quality assurance and academic boards argues that the current shift in quality assurance has created a risk for the quality of a university education, which now is defined as an outcome and not that of a barometer for enhanced scholarly goals. Furthermore, Rowlands suggests that the understanding of the words quality and quality assurance are so fused “that it is now almost universally understood (at least at the level of the state if not by university management) that the key means of both achieving and demonstrating quality in higher education is by way of a performance-measurement-driven quality assurance programme” (2012, p.99).

However, Isa a senior administrator in her department who continues to teach and mentor graduate students, questions performance based quality assurance policies in the university. Isa’s argument against performance based quality assurance instead supports the importance of understanding the context and complexity of higher education that cannot reduce the notion of ‘quality assurance’ to a universal measure,
Quality assurance *too often* for me, tries to *articulate* and make *explicit, exactly* what our teaching and leadership is going to do. It makes no sense to me. We have a *group* of human beings who walk in the door of a classroom with *all* of their own *complexities*, with *all* of their own experiences, *all* of their own *abilities*. You are *not* going to get *consistency*!

Consistency does not *come in the door; consistency* should not go out that door! *Quality* assurance should take students from where they are and *yes* get each one of them *further* along from where they *were*. So, progress is more circular. So, the present concept of *quality* assurance makes me, *ugh, dig my heels in*.

Thus, the current narrow understanding of quality assurance and accountability policies adopted in universities finds itself at odds with how some administrators and educators understand quality assurance as the above, shared by Isa, creates a disconnect with current methods of measuring quality assurance based on narrow metrics of performance. Therefore, if performance based metrics, as they are currently defined, are an ineffective way to measure learning as Isa stated; surely they represent a destructive method in which to assess the quality of a university and the work of those within.

Critiquing current methods of determining quality assurance and accountability in higher education more broadly, Rowlands (2012) continues to argue that this notion of quality assurance and accountability continue to create a *fake* and narrow understanding of these education policies when she writes that neoliberal policies, 

[E]nable the higher education system to process ever-increasing numbers of students; it provides global consumers with concise and specific information about the university education they are purchasing; it serves, in theory, as a means of mitigating the risk of defects and errors in the delivery of that education; and it assures publicly the quality of the higher education product and the credentials of graduates so necessary for the effective functioning of the global knowledge economy (Morley, 2003 in Rowlands, 2012, pp. 99-100).
Each senior administrator interviewed for this case study shared varying perspectives regarding their understanding of quality assurance and accountability in the university. Yet, there are also at times inferred similarities that are presented in the form of neoliberal language. The neoliberal rationality that is driving many governments and their public universities to rethink their relationship to the public by stressing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness under the quest to improve quality assurance and accountability is leading to a heightened awareness by some administrators that the “status quo is no longer a viable option in higher education” (Alexander, 2000, p. 411). Yet at the same time the use of neoliberal language by senior administrators when expressing their understanding of accountability creeps in leading to what Deem refers to as a form of “bilingualism” (1998). This becomes evident when Elizabeth is asked how she envisions quality assurance and accountability in the university? Elizabeth shares her perspective regarding quality assurance and accountability, the many layers of this regime, how Elizabeth believes accountability should operate in a university, and the importance of remaining faithful to the public taxpayer, making explicit that it is not the bureaucrat that Elizabeth feels accountable to but the public,

Well, there are a couple of layers there. One, when I hear quality assurance, I usually think government. And, I think agency. Whoever, whichever agency, for whichever government is going to look after quality assurance. So, there is that procedural level where invariably, you know, they are going to require a public school or a public university to adhere to certain parameters in their operations.

But, how does quality assurance and accountability operate in a university? It operates collegially. We have on the one hand lots of mechanisms for trying to assure the taxpayer and I say that because I often talk of the taxpayer- not the bureaucrat who has got all the rules about accountability in their office in Toronto or Ottawa, but more about keeping faith with society.
The above quote by Elizabeth is central to our discussions on quality assurance, accountability, and how academic leaders understand the responsibility of their role. The above quote is also demonstrative of the slippery slope of the form of bilingualism that Deem (1998) makes mention of in her study on new managerialism.

Under neoliberal policies there is the belief that university administrators are to be accountable to the public taxpayer while working with declining government resources, while also being responsible for improving the university’s quality of education, teaching and research. As Deem (2008) argues “new managerialism focuses on monitoring the achievement of targets (both at the organizational level and in devolved budgetary sub-units) and the performance of individual employees” (Deem, 2008, p. 258). These neoliberal trends lead to heightened competition for resources within and between universities, which then in turn leads to the outsourcing of funding as sought by universities through increased tuition fees, increased internationalization of students, the growth of satellite campus locations, the pursuit of large-scale research grants, patents, and alumni endowments.

The conversation on declining government resources for universities leads to a deeper discussion with Elizabeth about public universities, quality assurance, accountability, and the importance of, once again, her sense of being responsible to the taxpayer in support of public higher education,

So, when somebody is earning seventeen dollars an hour on a factory floor and their taxes are going to, in part, support public education, I take that very seriously. And, I believe we should honour the fact that we are in a very privileged place and that collegially we should work with colleagues to help them work out how to best operate as professors, as formal leaders, inside the faculty as parts of a greater university.
So, accountability is very important in a practical and pragmatic sense. If we don’t follow some of the key provisions of the formal requirements to show accountability we will be struggling to gain continued support from the public system.

What Elizabeth shares above expressed a neoliberal language yet also created an important disconnect with the research findings of the faculty members in this case study that expressed the lack of collegial support that they have experienced in their university.

Discussing with Claire the changing culture of universities and the recent changes made to the Ontario provincial student loan program created under the Liberal government in Ontario (2016), whereby each academically eligible student, coming from low-income families, would have all tuition costs supported through a provincial grant, a funding package eliminated under the current Conservative government, I ask Claire her thoughts regarding the impact of this reversal in policy regarding issues of access, equity, diversity, inclusion and being held to account. Claire’s response begins a conversation on the topic of the off-loading of financial responsibility from government to universities to “find ways to generate the revenues”,

Well then it is incumbent upon the institution to find ways to generate the revenues to ensure that the students they accept can come regardless of the financial issues and this university does have a policy in place that any student who is accepted into this university and then who faces financial challenges, that this university will find a way to fund them. More importantly this university does a massive amount of fundraising.

Though Premier Ford (2019) when eliminating the Liberal stimulus program, in Ontario, stated that he was reducing tuition for post secondary studies in Ontario by ten percent he also simultaneously eliminated student grants for students with a family income of less than $50,000, while also eliminating the six month grace period for recent university
graduates to begin repayment of their said student loans (Syed, National Observer, June 26, 2019). Thus, I question the following: What consequences do the off-loading of government financial supports have on young universities who may not have a rich history of endowments? What are the consequences for universities that are not research intensive and thus have little in the way of large-scale research grants and patents? What are the consequences of this off-loading of resources to the quality of the programs being offered and the quality of instruction? What is the implication for satellite university locations that are often remote or serve to educate many first generation university students? How does this shift in fiscal responsibility support a provincial policy mission for equity, diversity, and inclusion in the university? Under the influence of neoliberalism there is a growing emphasis in university governance on the imperative of creating a strong, efficient, and effective administration, one that adheres to the logics of ‘performance management’ (Middlehurst, 2016). However, as performance management, encouraged by neoliberal policies, pervades in higher education it skews the concept of quality assurance and accountability and what this means to equity and democracy in higher education.

Middlehurst critiquing the rise of performance management in the university writes, “Perceptions and attitudes are frequently polarised between proponents and critics of changing higher education governance, leading to sterile debates that neither advance understanding nor practice” (2016, p.189). Elizabeth speaking of this polarization also makes mention of the importance of the small everyday changes that can occur in the university; changes that provide hope,

I expect each of us at the university, faculty, administrators, and managers, to work really hard and along the way to be
respectful and feel a sense of freedom that they can make a lot of judgments in the course of doing our work. But, I’m not going to micromanage them. That’s one modest endeavor. Then if you were to replicate that across faculties and in central positions here. This is a remarkable university! The level of compassion and progressive stances here is very significant, very impressive. So, you can do small things everyday. Are we constrained by lack of funding? Yes!

Isa also speaks of accountability in the university sharing of the importance of collegial respect and the importance of having those ‘hard conversations’ and what it means to be a positive leader in the university,

In order for someone to be a positive leader there has to be inspiration. There has to be inspiration in ways that motivate people who may or may not be motivated. And, I guess in addition to being inspirational is to be respectful of the people with whom they are working! It’s rare I’m afraid! It is rare! What I think we should be doing in the university is engaging in really hard conversations, and it is okay if we disagree with each other, but let’s talk about why and where? Not because we’re going to change but because then we can understand, we can refine our own arguments. But, let’s not hate each other because we disagree.

Furthering our discussion on quality assurance and accountability Isa also shared concern that quality assurance, now defined using a corporate lens, fails to capture the complex cultures of the university and the diversity of the student context when she asserts,

I think that corporatization has really knocked the hell out of things in the public university and so many other areas. I think with all of the budgetary monitoring that it’s why the Deans of universities have had to become people who are fiscally responsible as opposed to people who say, “Hey, we have an idea so let’s figure out how to make that happen”. And, I think that’s unfortunate because I think that you can have a restricted budget and still accomplish exciting things.
Thus, the culture inside universities is posited to have experienced an unbalanced shift from public good to corporate good due to neoliberalism; a shift that places increasing emphasis on markets, rankings, standardization, competitiveness and policies that are created to ensure quality assurance and accountability, which are increasingly steered by provincial, national, and global economic strategic plans (Brown, 2019; Connell, 2019, Brown, 2015).

Although Isa positions herself as a critic of neoliberalism, the rationality of neoliberalism yet again appears in the language used even by those who are critically minded. Isa when sharing the following regarding the work of those in the university who increasingly do more for less questions, apologetically, why there is an expectation by those who do more for less to be compensated. Isa’s statement for me as a graduate student at the time of this study causes me to reflect on my own experiences when she says,

You can’t do it if all the people you are working with say, “How much are you going to pay me to do it?” That’s a really sad situation. It is interesting as I sit here now with all my great privilege, with my salary, but it hasn’t always been like that. It took me a long time to get to this place; my position here, and there was very careful budgetary management, personally, that has gone on over the years!

Though I appreciate Isa’s journey and her many accomplishments, the above quote directly connects with the research of those in universities that critically engage with accountability and the increasing work intensification by precarious academics that is actually very telling. Connell addressing this concern writes, “Managements seem to have little gut awareness of the level of stress and the potential for anger among university workers” (2019, p.130). What Isa shared and what Connell (2019) argues truly
is a fine line as much of our work as academics in the university is invisible and for those of us that are passionate and inspired by our work, there is nothing of ourselves we would not give. Yet, this said, we must be mindful and protective of the value of that time and of that heart.

Structurally the language of the evolving and context dependent ideologies of neoliberalism increasingly infuses the discourse on accountability and quality assurance within the university. When asking Isa of the importance of quality assurance in a public university Isa states it is “not a matter of not wanting quality assurance. It is a matter of what it has turned into”. The literature reviewed on quality assurance and accountability suggests that educationally as each nation and region strive for this ever-illusive goal it remains indefinable. Globally, one-size-fits-all projects are well underway, whereby quality is measured by the quality of teaching, the quality of the students’ experience, the ability to attract large scale research grants, and the employability of university graduates. Yet, there are those drawing from critical scholarship that suggest that “not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted…But, measures on metrics and comparisons, including international ones, is high” (Valeikiene, 2019, paragraph 15).

Speaking with Claire about the role of quality assurance and accountability in the university the language of new managerialism begins to resurface. However, there are also moments when Clair shares her hesitance regarding neoliberal measures of quality and accountability as prescribed by the SMA. Yet, it is Claire’s suggestion that the university’s mission for excellence, which she says is directly connected with the
government’s mission for achieving EDI, that demonstrates the changing culture of the university,

I think if you were to think about the Strategic Mandate Agreement, the SMA, that each institution of higher education in Ontario has to agree to in order to get monies from Queen’s Park the SMA sets out what you, as a public university, expect to accomplish in a variety of ways. And, so to some extent quality assurance is ensuring that you actually meet the goals that the university and the government have required you to meet. Whether that is in terms of the number of students that you are bringing in, the graduation rates, the length of time it takes for a student to graduate- those would all be tied to some of the SMA.

Quality assurance though, I think, is about the quality of research that you are doing. I think quality is also about the environment within which your students and your faculty participate. So, for me part of that, and how it links to things that I would be involved in, quality very much links to equity, diversity and inclusion.

So, if I look at the things that I have accomplished, one of the things that I am most proud of is that this university has a statement on equity, diversity, inclusion and excellence! And, this university has linked these in the sense that we will not be an excellent institution if we are not embracing equity, diversity and inclusion.

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) mandates that a section of the SMA be dedicated to the “Student Experience”, whereby a sub-section under “Student Experience” dedicates a focus to “Access and Equity”. Under “Access and Equity” it is here that a list of the following categories are listed such as: Number of first generation students enrolled at an institution, number of students with disabilities enrolled at an institution, number of indigenous students enrolled at an institution, share of OSAP recipients at an institution relative to its total number of eligible students, and number of transfer applicants and registrants. However, what is telling from the SMA reports
published by the university of each participant is the absence noted between the university’s mission statement and what Claire herself shared. For although each university, that each administrator is a member of, is comprised of a student population greater than 30,000 students, only one university shared the number of first generation students, indigenous students, and students who identify with disabilities, which when combined made up less than 5,000 while the other universities leave some of these categories blank or provided vague language such as “current levels” without providing what the current levels are. Also, of interest is that other marginalized populations in Ontario are not provided a category to demonstrate metrics regarding EDI, which is to be linked to quality and accountability.

For more than thirty years leadership studies in universities have received growing attention as leadership studies in education now replace administrative studies and are becoming strongly connected with performance management (Middlehurst, 2016). While policy texts and policy discourses regarding performance management and the leadership of public universities continue to cite the significance of achieving quality assurance and accountability in public universities through increased access, retention of students, graduation rates and rates of employment; there continues to be limited critical engagement on how contemporary policies for quality assurance and accountability shape, change, or enhance the culture of EDI for students, faculty and university leaders (Usher, 2019; Brown, 2018; Blackmore, 2016; Rowlands, 2012; Deem, 2008; Deem, 1998).
Leadership & Gender

Two prominent Canadian scholars on the subject of gender, higher education, leadership and women’s work in the university, Sandra Acker and Jo-Anne Dillabough, commenting on the lack of diversity and the inequalities that continue regarding the gender division of women’s labour in the university suggest, “Much of the more recent literature highlights the forms of inequality that diverse groups of women still face in a largely male dominated labour structure even as their post-war representation in universities is expanding and has increased substantially over the last four decades (Acker and Dillabough, 2007, p. 297).

Jill Blackmore’s (2016) research on gender, the importance of diversity and educational leadership discusses this significance drawing from the work on gender and social justice as advanced by scholar Nancy Fraser. Nancy Fraser, whose contributions to research on social justice, feminism, and its applicability to research to academic leadership are made apparent through Fraser’s three philosophical concepts of representation, recognition and redistribution and Blackmore’s adaptation of this work (Blackmore, 2016) to academic leadership. Thus, it is Fraser’s three concepts of social justice that lead Blackmore to comment, “Leadership is symbolic. Who leads and how they lead reflects how fairness and equity are understood in democratic societies and education” (2016, p. 69). Therefore, this section will continue with the work of Acker, Blackmore, and other scholars who are situated in critical studies on leadership and gender including comments pertinent to this theme from the three administrators who participated in this study. Blackmore (2016) asserting the importance of leadership and diversity suggests,
The debate and discussion that occur when people with different positions come together are a Good Thing. However, we think it is ironic that at the same time as national governments and transnational agencies are concerned to maintain diversity of plants, animals and habitats, precisely the opposite is occurring with educational policy ideas and practices. ‘Good’ leadership features prominently among one-best global prescriptions and representations (2016, p. xiii).

It is to this inequality that studies on gender and leadership, as reported by the European University Association (EUA, 2019), show that women continue to be under-represented in academic and leadership roles. Yet interestingly, the EUA (2019) report that men appear less represented as undergraduates in universities. A disconnect then occurs- if more women are attending university at the undergraduate level, why are more men achieving roles as academics and academic leaders in higher education (EUA, 2019)?

Blackmore (2016) questioning the lack of diversity in representation of leadership roles within Australian universities states, “misrecognition cannot be disassociated from maldistribution or misrepresentation” (p.75). Thus, addressing the accelerated culture of neoliberalism in university leadership, Blackmore (2016) argues for the importance of seeking different perspectives, such as Fraser’s that focus on social justice and equity, when researching leadership and gender. Emanuela Spano’s (2020) research on academic leadership and gender focuses on women leaders in the university from two contrasting university policy systems, Italy and the UK. Spano (2020), supporting what Fraser (2000) argued many years ago regarding recognition (identity) and redistribution (economics), states that “the assumption that women have secured a level of opportunity and advantage in the workplace collides with the pattern of male prevalence in senior and middle
leadership positions that is still visible in countries with diverse policies and gender equality legislation” (Pp. 302-303).

Acker and Wagner (2017) investigating diversity and research leadership in higher education speak of the lack of representation in the university when they assert, “Neoliberal emphasis on accountability, competition, efficiency, individualism and managerialism are thought to deepen the disadvantages of women and ethnic minority academics in pursuing research, as well as those in small universities or in countries on the periphery (Acker & Wagner, 2017, p.6). Thus, revisiting the work of Blackmore (2016) who incorporates theories for social justice and feminism as developed by Nancy Fraser I am reminded of Isa, who when reflecting on her time as a female PhD student, working full-time, while raising children, shared of the importance of recognition when her thesis supervisor, who is male, doubted her readiness to move on from her course work to begin her research on a traditional monograph dissertation that she had hoped to make into a book when completed,

I was determined to write a thesis. That was why I came back to university, to pursue my PhD. I wanted to write a book. I knew what I was doing. I was working full time, I had two, maybe even three, little children at that time. I said to my supervisor, “Okay, the course work is done, I am ready to do the thesis. I am going to write the proposal”. Well, my then Supervisor says to me, and this is on the phone, he said to me, “Oh, I don’t really think that you’re ready to write a thesis. I was like “What?” I was dead-halt. This is the point of the whole thing! I said, “Okay, I’ll get back to you”. I hung the phone up and burst into tears.

Acker and Dillabough highlight this personal and professional experience in their 2007 study that focused on gender and leadership. Thus, the kind of academic mentorship and leadership that Isa mentions above required Isa to demonstrate great courage in order to
rise above what was clearly misrecognition based on her gender and the responsibilities that Isa embraced through her gendered role. I believe it was this experience that placed Isa on her first step toward leadership in the university when Isa shares the following,

Then I thought, “I’m *not doing* this”. *No! That’s not happening!* I know that I’m *ready*. I don’t know what this *person* thinks? So, I got a hold of a *very strong feminist scholar* on my campus and I said I need a supervisor. I know that I am at the end of my course work, but, if I send to you some of my writing would you look at it and would you consider being my thesis supervisor? She looked at my writing and wrote me back and said to me that she would accept me!

Although Isa’s first PhD supervisor tried to recant, Isa expressed that what she actually needed from her first supervisor was support in her goal of writing a traditional monograph thesis, which eventually did become the book that Isa had always hoped for her thesis to be, and not the assumption from a supervisor that due to being female and raising children, while also working, she was not capable of this goal. Therefore, what Isa shares above brought me back to something that Elizabeth said in our interview and how it relates to gender and the discourse on leadership, “that’s the thing about *dominant groups*, they always assume”. It is to the experiences of women, similar to Isa, that Fraser (2000) argues what is needed is a “way of rethinking the politics of recognition in a way that can help to solve, or at least mitigate, the problems of displacement and reification” (para. 7). Continuing our conversation on leadership and gender, Elizabeth mentions the concept of power, the importance of recognition and what this means to the identity of under-represented groups when she asserts the following,

*Well of course* it’s *still* a *white guys* world. There are an increasing, *slowly increasing*, number of women moving into more senior administrative roles where sometimes they can *extend* a lot of *goodness* in what they do. And, at other times
they, some of the women assuming these senior roles, are very traditional and very pedestrian. But, it’s a good thing.

So, there are symbols that we can bring with some of the appointments in a university. With gender I think we have a long way to go here! I would say that. But I have to be a bit careful, as it is still context dependent. But, yes, we are not quite as progressive here, in Canada, as we could be. However, I think that there is a ground swell of openness to expanding how we understand who should be in what positions inside the university and it really should mirror society, but this may not be enough.

Acker (2012) agrees with this opinion when researching gender and says, “early feminist work rarely questioned the division of the world into male and female—instead seeking to compare experiences or accomplishments of these two groups—and was not always attuned to the ways in which race and class and other attributes intersected with gender” (p. 412).

Speaking with Claire of gendered roles in administration, the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion in the university, I asked if it is rare for a Canadian public university to have women in a similar role to her own, being part of senior administration. Claire tells me that there continues to be under-representation of women in her role and how representation sends a message to your community when there are ‘female academics’ in leadership positions,

Well, let’s just say that there are not very many women who are in senior administration in the university and I am thrilled that my successor is also a woman and a full-tenured professor. It sends a message to your community when you have academic leaders that are women.

What Claire shares regarding the representation of women in leadership, brings to the fore an argument made by Blackmore (2016) regarding diversity, the concept of social justice, how this relates to academic leadership, and the argument made
by Acker (2017) regarding intersectionality when conducting research on gender. Blackmore (2016) writes, “The language of diversity is readily incorporated (appropriated) into strategic plans and mainstreamed so as to become ‘second nature…when it ceases to cause trouble, and is aligned with economistic discourses of competitive individualism- excellence, reputation, success and performance (p.75).

As the conversation of gender and leadership deepens, our discussion begins to look at the role of ‘support’ in the pursuit of leadership as women administrators in the university. Both Elizabeth and Isa provide a very interesting account regarding power, positive leadership, and the role of the male academics that supported their professional goals. Isa suggests that over the course of her career there have been many who have cast doubt regarding her professional plans and aspirations. Asked if that doubting her was about a power dynamic? Isa questions, “whose power?” Isa, when asked if the doubt she experienced professionally is about “male power” states,

A number of the people who have not supported my path, who have blocked me from getting in the roles I have achieved, have been women actually. So, no, unless we think that male power can drift over to women, like, Margaret Thatcher who wanted to be the Prime Minister of England. Thatcher did it; she governed, like being like the men.

Therefore, as Acker and Wagner (2017) in their study on feminist scholarship argue, it is not enough to simply have gendered representation in the university; it is equally of importance for that gendered representation to be a reflection of all women and not a reflection of ‘a stereotypically masculinist or macho way of operating’ arguing,

While overt discrimination has diminished, neoliberalism has provided an alternative, less obvious form of gender division, as institutions reward a stereotypically masculinist or macho
way of operating (Thomas and Davies, 2002), promoting toughness, boasting, individualism and competition, downplaying the emotional side of life (Leathwood and Hey, 2009) and overall creating what Morley (2016, 5) calls a ‘virility culture’ and Thornton (2013, 3) terms the ‘re-masculinisation of the university’ (Acker & Wagner, 2017, pp. 6-7).

Borrowing from Spano (2020) the above quote by Isa and the quote from the research by Acker and Wagner (2017), demonstrates that a woman in achieving leadership, even the most noble of roles in leadership, “does not always mean a step forward for women… Margaret Thatcher especially resented being defined by her gender. She wasn’t a feminist icon and she was not an icon for women. She was a prime minister who ‘happened’ to be a woman” (p. 307).

Spano (2020) then introduces the myth of leadership and promotes the idea that a renaissance in university leadership is required if universities are to thrive during increasingly complex times due to neoliberal globalization, neoliberal accountability, and the ideologies that endorse it. Research on academic leadership by Spano (2020) suggests that the concept of solidarity among women in university leadership is brought into question as Spano (2020) argues that while many studies abound regarding the ‘sisterhood’ in academia, these studies lack qualitative critical engagement as the phenomenon of ‘sisterhood’ and solidarity’ are rarely experienced by female leaders in higher education.

Elizabeth critically engaging with the concept of the myth of leadership and gender regarding her own experiences as a senior administrator in the university suggests the importance of being mindful and open when discussing gender and the possible bias to “cast a particular demography in a certain way”. Elizabeth, expanding on the
significance of diversity in leadership roles in the university speaks to that, as did Isa, regarding becoming much more sophisticated in gender relations and support from colleagues,

I don’t appreciate it if I personally, or when others in the university, are sidelined because of sexism or heterosexism or racism. I don’t appreciate that. It’s not the way to live and it does not feel good if that is happening. However, I have to say, there are many men that I have worked with who have been much more progressive and generous in my endeavours than some of the women I have worked with! So, I don’t have the view of women that I had in the late 70s where I thought it was all about guys being sexist. I’ve become much more sophisticated in my understanding of how people exist, for sure, but that is important to keep in mind.

What Elizabeth expresses above is about institutional sexism for which women themselves are also complicit in this institutional process. Returning to questions of gender and leadership Elizabeth had this to say regarding community, opportunity, and motivation,

I do hear sometimes people wanting to cast a particular demography in a certain way and I think that is perhaps impatience. It is not real to me. If I think of somebody like my PhD mentor, who is a man, or my Father who was constantly pushing the significance of community! Work for the community! Make a better world! Not the sort of run for yourself culture that encourages people to get up the ladder as fast as you can and don’t give two hoots about who is below you. That is disgraceful thinking from my point of view.

So, I don’t know. I am all for women getting opportunities because I think there are many women who are still denied it. I try to do my bit here with professors, but it is not as straightforward in a university as it might be elsewhere because you have many people who are a little bit more extrinsically motivated. And again, that’s because some of them have drunk from the ‘Kool-Aid’ fountain that says, run for your self.
Thus, women in positions of leadership in the university are dealing with a multitude of structural and cultural dynamics brought about by social norms regarding their gender and neoliberalism that shapes and informs how women could function within this institutional culture. Acker (2012) comments on these complexities when she asserts,

> Women in leadership positions are not only dealing with being underrepresented or doing work that ‘disappears’, they are working in institutions and departments which carry certain workplace cultures (Acker, 1999), ways of operating and systems of belief that (among other understandings) incorporate ideas about gender, race, class, age and other complexities of identity (Leathwood and Read, 2009, p. 125 in Acker, 2012, p. 418).

In closing our interview, I ask Isa what ‘good’ leadership means in the university and what it means to be ‘engaged’ as faculty members and leaders. Isa talks about a man who is her ‘boss’ and with whom she shares a healthy and respectful professional relationship,

> I think there is another thing that goes on in universities though and that is that universities are places where you don’t find a whole lot of educational leaders in administrative positions. They are people who can manage things. They can manage budgets, they can manage people and they can manage to meet the requirements of this, that, and the other thing.

> But, the real educational leaders I find are few and far between. So that’s why I like my current boss. Even though he understands fully the details of what’s required for successful research metrics he also really wants research to happen. He wants faculty to be engaged in research and he wants it to be a vibrant research culture.

In conclusion, it is important to state that the experiences of the participants in relation to gender and leadership were complex and embedded the web of institutional practice. Here, I revisit once again the research on gender and leadership advanced by Acker (2012), in her paper, which is a personal and critically reflective study on gender, race,
culture, and academic leadership. Drawing on her own experiences as a departmental chairperson in a Canadian university from 1999 to 2002, she discusses the complexities of gender and leadership,

The gendering of academic leadership is complicated by all the changing and conflicting intersectionalities and idiosyncrasies that make it difficult to know what is at issue when conflict ensues. Looking through a series of lenses will add to the depth of our comprehension of women and academic leadership, as long as we acknowledge that each individual perspective is necessarily imperfect (p.424).

Chapter Summary

This chapter set out to explore the research findings of three senior administrators in higher education in Ontario, Canada. Each of the administrators interviewed for this study revealed similar experiences and thoughts as leaders in their university. Yet, each interviewee also conveyed varied experiences and philosophies regarding leadership, quality assurance, and accountability in the university. While several themes from each interview come to light, the following three themes emerged as significant to the professional experiences shared by each regarding quality assurance and accountability in the university, namely: 1) Public Universities as Democratic Institutions; 2) Quality Assurance & Accountability: The Changing Culture of the University; and 3) Leadership and Gender.

As stated at the onset of this chapter the word ‘accountability’ has become a ‘buzzword’ in higher education policy, where according to recent research the word ‘accountability’ has “increased tenfold in studies between 1965 and 2000” (Smith and Benavot, 2019, p. 193). Thus, the findings of this chapter created a focus on quality assurance, accountability, and neoliberalism and how each has come to shape the
professional experiences of the three administrators as documented. Debates surrounding the rise of new public management and/or new managerialism in the university abound. Universities are now placed under greater scrutiny in the role of being accountable for local and global economic development and each administrator noted the decreasing role of government in the provision of resources, government accountability, and the continued importance of the public university for the democratic good. Given the current neoliberal culture of higher education, the administrators in this study shared experiences whereby they find themselves both accountable to government, the public, and policies brought about by the audit culture. The challenges expressed by each suggest “that academic quality assurance is one of the ways in which that audit culture has manifested itself in organisations (Power, 2000) and that such monitoring processes…change the institutional practices they are monitoring, defining what constitutes quality and performance (Rowlands, 2012, p. 105). This then bring us to our final chapter that will conclude this case study on quality assurance, accountability, and the neoliberal rationality in higher education.
Chapter 7:

Conclusion

For once a world of personal responsibility with its characteristic virtues and marks of decency (honour, friendship, fidelity, fairness) is ruptured or emptied, what rushes in to take its place is politics as a “technology of power”, in Vaclav Havel’s phrase (Elshtain, 1993, p.89)

Introduction

As neoliberalism seeks to reduce our human experience to pure economics, where each is individually responsible for one’s own needs and the idea put forth by Hayek, and later Thatcher, that there is no such thing as a collective ‘society’, we are now collectively faced with neoliberalism under the guise of government. The ability to critically engage with knowledge and think of our world more broadly is being limited whereby higher education, now, is merely a measurable outcome and not a learning experience. This lack of criticality, lack of human experience, and increasing emphasis on measurable outcomes in the university leads Brown (2019) to assert, “A generation [has] turned away from liberal arts education [and] also turned against it” (p.6). The empirical findings from this case study spoke to and illuminated each of these challenges as shared by the voice of six faculty members and three administrators from universities located in Ontario, Canada.

Retracing the Study

The main objective of this research study was to explore the professional experiences of faculty members and administrators in higher education during a time of increasing accountability and quality assurance policies in order to gain a deeper understanding of
how neoliberalism, used as rationality, is changing their work experience as academics. Specifically, this research attempted to answer the following questions: What role does neoliberalism play in what ‘counts’ as quality in higher education? How do faculty members and administrators experience quality assurance policies? And, how do quality assurance policies, framed through a neoliberal rationality, affect how faculty members and administrators understand themselves as subjects in the university? Thus, as a case study, this research questioned how policies for quality assurance and accountability, framed through neoliberalism, have come to shape the professional experiences of faculty members and administrators.

I have presented the research findings by employing policy sociology as both theory and methodology using the method of the qualitative case study. I have investigated the experiences of six faculty members and three administrators through the use of semi-structured interviews that used open-ended questions. This form of qualitative inquiry provided me with an opportunity to explore how each interviewee navigates the current context of neoliberalism within each of their respective roles in the university. This led to each of the following three findings for Faculty members: 1) Quality Assurance and the Annual Evaluation: Evidence or Surveillance; 2) Datafication and a Politics of Refusal; and 3) Academic Entrepreneurship: The intensification of Publish, Get Large-Scale Grants, or Perish. Additionally, each interview conducted with the three senior-administrators led to the following findings: 1) Public Universities as Democratic Institutions; 2) Quality Assurance and Accountability: The Changing Culture of the University; and 3) Leadership and Gender.
Education policy and educational reforms, such as those driven by the neoliberal global pursuit of quality assurance and accountability, “suggest that policy is value-laden [original emphasis]. Values pervade policy processes and policy content. Traditionally these values articulated national interests… global considerations now enter the articulation of values as never before, transforming the balance between economic efficiency and the social equity goals of education” (Lingard and Rizvi, 2010, p.16).

This research revealed that a critical analysis of policies regarding quality assurance and accountability in higher education must begin to take into consideration an account of the local and personal professional context that at present are eclipsed by neoliberal global discourses regarding what is valued as the purpose and goal of higher education. Each of the participants in this study talked about work experiences judged by norms of performativity and the consequences of not meeting the norms; the consequences, which are not derived from the data per se but rather by not meeting the performativity criteria. The interviewees described work experiences based on performativity; performativity that is driven by datafication and its consequences that are voiced by each of the participants in this study. This research documented, analyzed, and critically engaged with how policies of quality assurance and accountability have created an increased sense of surveillance and performativity, and how the rise of datafication in the work of faculty members and administrators has placed higher education in Ontario, Canada on the slippery slope of performance based funding that is becoming increasingly standardized due to neoliberalism. This was exemplified in particular by the work experiences of faculty members such as Kate, Alexander, and Jessie; and the administrative work of each participant. Thus, the current discourse on policies for quality assurance and
accountability in higher education, framed through articulations and re-articulations of neoliberalism, envisioned by the Ontario Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA), require immediate attention in regard to how these neoliberal policies shape and inform what counts as quality assurance and accountability in the university.

Giving what we presently understand about neoliberalism as an economic, political, and cultural ideology, Brown (2018) argues, “What is needed now is an alternative, but equally compelling, vision of society that offsets and counterbalances the emphasis on individual agency with a recognition of the benefits and possibilities of collective action and social solidarity” (p.20); a statement that would be sure to incite Hayek, and those who may be like-minded, who argued that our understanding of a collective ‘society’ is misguided and misunderstood (Brown, 2019). Thus, this final chapter seeks to provide a summary of the research as it relates to each interviewee’s experience of quality assurance and accountability policy in higher education as researched and understood using the lens of policy sociology, which also took into consideration the dance between the current literature on the significance of neoliberalism and how neoliberalism, as an economic and political ideology, frames the experiences of policies on quality assurance and accountability. This chapter concludes with a critical reflection on the research contributions of this study, thoughts on the limitations, while also providing insight on the impact of neoliberalism.

**Knowledge Contributions & Policy Sociology**

This study contributes to the existing body of literature on higher education, which while rich when exploring theories of neoliberalism has contributed sparingly to empirical data that analyze the context of the professional experiences of those in higher education. This
research builds on this by analyzing faculty members and administrators work experiences as they relate to policies for quality assurance and accountability, framed by neoliberalism. Ozga (2019) who speaks to the importance of qualitative studies that employ policy sociology argues that policy sociology developed in response “to the ways in which some researchers were reacting to the policy developments of the 1980s, a response which seemed to me to be more preoccupied with documenting events than with analysing them” (Ozga, 2019, p.2).

Reflecting on her work from 1987, regarding the limitations of a traditionalist approach to education policy and the dire need for policy sociology, Ozga revisits her past study in her 2019 article when she states that it is important to understand the historical context of what gave rise to policy sociology and the more recent critical policy sociology (CPS). CPS, she asserts creates, “a focus on knowledge and governing, as well as the emphasis on reflexivity in the broadest sense, that is research that is aware of and alert to the circumstances of its own production, and committed to analysis of the effects of those combinations on the development of perspectives and conceptualisations of policy” (Ozga, 2019, Pp. 3-4).

The findings from this study demonstrate the importance of critical policy sociology. While the findings of this study echo the concerns brought about by policy sociology regarding applied empirical research that seeks to add to the neoliberal quest for “improved efficiency and improved performance” (Ozga, 2019, p.2); it also importantly points to the need of sociology to CPS that demonstrates the important link between theory and methodology in research that informs and “reflects upon current trends in education policy and education research to suggest that they often lose sight of
the broader context of educational practice. Marketisation policies and school improvement programmes are seen as examples of this danger” (Whitty, 1997, p. 121).

The faculty members and administrators in this study clearly expressed how policies for quality assurance and accountability have changed their and their students’ experiences related to culture and learning, creating unwelcome consequences and an environment that is challenged by increasing individualism, competition, and administrative pressures. Several of the participants shared how these policy pressures have led to a culture of performativity, and at times silence, in the university whereby the burden to create economic stability based on measurable outcomes for society has created a sense of surveillance, alienation, and entrepreneurship that often negated the difficult conversations that are needed in a university between “schooling and radicalization, schooling and democratic citizenship, in exploring education and gender relations, or nationalism, or considering violence, ethnicity and sexuality in education” (Ozga, 2019, p.10).

Another element that this research highlights is in regard to Stephen Ball’s work on policy and policy sociology in education that often centres on the changes brought about in the work of educators due to the development and implementation of neoliberal education policy and how educators enact these policies. Ball (1997b) aptly makes the distinction between ‘policy-oriented’ research and ‘practice-oriented’ research stating, “Clearly a great deal of research ‘about’ education or schooling is not ‘about’ policy at all…Policy is ignored or theorised ‘out of the picture’. This is particularly the case in research about classrooms, about teachers and about schools which treats them as free-standing and self-determining, as ‘out of context’” (p.265). Thus, this study and the
voices shared in this research also contribute to the discourse regarding the importance of policy enactment in higher education.

Although the aim of this research was to provide an analysis of how policies for quality assurance and accountability have come to shape the work experiences of those who participated in this case study, it would have been impossible to omit documentation of neoliberal policies oriented for quality assurance and accountability which brought about changes in the experiences of those who were interviewed. Each of the neoliberal policies mentioned, including the SMA, had an effect on the experiences; however, they do shed light in regard to the caused experiences. Experiences of the faculty members and administrators in this study; thus, the experiences shared by faculty members and administrators in this study provided evidence as to the significant role that neoliberalism plays regarding the university community, administration, and government in shaping their experiences in respect to quality assurance, accountability, and ultimately their own professional identities.

Ball’s (1998) work on education policy shows the significant role re-contextualizing plays in the global discourses on education policy when he asserts “Most policies are ramshackle, compromise, hit and miss affairs, that are reworked, tinkered with, nuanced and inflected through complex processes of influence, text production, dissemination and, ultimately, re-creation in contexts of practice” (Ball, 1994 in Ball, 1998, p.126). I agree with Ball (1994/1998) that many policies, such as the Strategic Mandate Agreement for example, are illustrative of policy that is “ramshackle [and a] hit and miss affair” and while some of the participants in this study did share how they have compromised, tinkered, and re-created their own “context of practice”; however, I must
question how much longer these spaces for re-contextualizing policies in higher education might exist, especially given the recent higher education policy changes made in France regarding student and academic freedom (Kamdar, 2020).

Thus, increasingly ‘oriented-policy’ and ‘policy-practiced’ are becoming standardized to a degree that in ways are creating what Paulo Freire (1972) once wrote of as a *culture of silence* despite the level of criticality, reflexivity, expert knowledge, commitment and passion that each faculty member and administrator who gave of their time for this study shared. This is specifically important when factoring in the power of hegemonic neoliberalism and what the current neoliberal rationality means to the purpose of the public university.

Although each participant of this study shared varied individual and personal accounts as academics, one aspect that did not vary was the concern brought about by neoliberalism. The appropriation of neoliberal language at times itself used by each faculty member and administrator illuminates the complexity brought about by neoliberalism and how each participant not only questioned the present neoliberal culture of their university; but also participated in a neoliberal rationality. The experiences, which I have documented lend to the research of Wendy Brown when she asks, “Where are we” (Brown, 2019, p. 2)?

Discussing the learning culture and expectations in a university, the value of the work as researchers and educators, and the significance of good leadership each participant echoed Brown’s (2019) research, which sought to address the question of “Where are we?” and my own question ‘how did we get here’? Brown (2019) attempting to address heightened neoliberalism in societies of the Global North brought about by a
A plenitude of neoliberal policies offers the following explanation and source of the phenomenon when she writes, “powerful right-wing think tanks and political money” (p.6) amongst many other characteristics indicative of our neoliberal times. However, Brown argues that this narrative is incomplete.

The ‘incomplete’ that Brown (2019) mentions above is most evident when considering education and the state of public universities here in Canada. Although in Canada, there continues to be an economic and political buffer; that buffer is growing dangerously thin, especially in light of the government policy regarding performance based funding, the SMA, and the changes made to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). The “incomplete” that Brown speaks of is also evidenced in other nations around the world seeking greater government control over student movements and academic freedom. However, one aspect from this study that stood out for me is the hope that each participant continues to carry, their love for all they do in the university, and the sense of autonomy that each expressed. It was when reflecting on these experiences that I am transported back to the work of Connell (2019) who when writing of the current generation of university students and the many global issues that they are, and will be, facing states,

We desperately need ways to generate better futures. Universities are often politically and socially conformist, and neoliberal management is making them more boring by the day. But as bearers of a research-based knowledge formation, and responsible for education at the most advanced levels, university workers must be concerned with challenges to received ideas (p.10).
Thus, to borrow a word from one interviewee, it is “incumbent” upon the university and governments alike to seek the spaces for hope that resist and reject the ‘Frakensteinian’ (Brown, 2019) experiment that has become higher education.

**Implications**

This case study holds important implications for future policy research on higher education, especially in light of the Strategic Mandate Agreement in Ontario, Canada and how this will affect universities in Ontario’s more remote regions and issues concerning Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Thus, my research findings have a practical significance to higher educational policy for universities in Ontario. The objective of this study was to identify how policies for quality assurance and accountability, framed through discourses of neoliberalism, have changed the experiences of faculty members and administrators in higher education. This study provides an important exploration of how neoliberal policy changes shape the understanding of quality assurance and accountability as experienced by faculty members and administrators in higher education.

This research set out to answer: “What role does neoliberalism play in what ‘counts’ as quality in higher education? The resounding answer provided by the interviewees regarding what counts as quality is metrics and datafication through faculty members annual assessments as presented in their ‘ratings’ as a professor given by students, their publication metrics, and the increasing importance of large-scale grants that act as measures of performativity and surveillance. The second question this research sought to answer: “How do faculty members and administrators practice quality assurance policies?” The answer by each became somewhat more difficult to discern as neoliberal language often couched their responses. Each participant expressed a sense of
his or her own responsibility, morality, and privilege. Each also expressed their own sense of the lack of importance/ but the importance of the datafication of their accomplishments in order to maintain their position in the university or to seek advancement as viewed as ‘quality assurance’ and ‘accountability’.

My final research question for this study: “How do faculty members and administrators understand their experience in the university?” It is here where the research findings become most interesting for while each participant spoke of the intensification of their work brought about by neoliberalism; each and every participant spoke of their privilege in the university, their frustration, their concerns, and the ultimate love of their vocation. As previously shared in this research, Kate when concluding our interview spoke of the importance of loving what one does in their work in the university, how this experience is rarely noted in research on quality assurance and accountability in higher education, and how this is truly a ‘sad’ commentary on the culture of the university today.

Limitations

As stated previously in my methodology chapter, case study research as a method is not without critique and Yin (2009) suggests that possibly the most popular criticism is “over lack of rigor” (p.14). However, Stake (2005) challenges this critique when he asserts, “Good case study research follows disciplined practices of analysis and triangulation to tease out what deserves to be called experiential knowledge from what is opinion and preference” (Stake, 2004 in Stake 2005, p.455). Thus, what is paramount to qualitative case study research is not what is generalizable to the case but what is particular (Stake, 1995, 2004, 2005; Yin, 2003, 2009; Patton). Baxter and Jack (2008), claim that the
qualitative case study is one path in education research that promotes the examination of an experience or event within its context utilizing multiple sources. It is this approach, which can safeguard that the case or cases being studied are examined not through one perspective but rather multiple perspectives which in turn affords a variety of issues to be exposed and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544 in Lawrence-Mazier, 2014, p. 31).

Methodologically, Cohen et al (2011) caution how the qualitative case study may be challenging to construct. Qualitative case studies have been criticized for their weakness with regard to generalizations and thus may be considered a limitation to this research. However, what motivates those in qualitative case study is the focus on the depth and particularity of a case not the generalizability across populations (Lawrence-Mazier. 2014, p. 81). Another limitation to this study was the difficulty in attracting participants. Although more than twenty academics from different universities were invited to participate in this study via email invitations, only six faculty members and three administrators confirmed. Based on the experiences shared by each interviewee, I attribute the lack of expressed interest to participate in this study to the imposed limitations that neoliberalism has created in the university regarding the resource of time and the culture of silence that is growing among academics themselves. Most, significantly it is my own time that became the greatest limitation for this study. While not wanting to admit that the loss of my Mother should have required me to take pause, I continued my work often making errors in haste that required me to take more time in correcting, which speaks to the need for the slow professor and deliberate thought.
Recommendations & Future Research

The role of ideology, politics, and economics in the purpose of higher education is a necessary focus for future research on higher education as universities are a cultural site for societal reproduction, which increasingly supports inequality and the division of labour framed by the neoliberal rationality. When reflecting on my findings regarding faculty members, quality assurance, and the importance of research, each participant spoke of the narrow understanding by both government and the university that sheds light on the tensions and the need to re-think how we define and value quality accountability in the university. This became evident with Kate who while being an internationally renowned scholar with countless publications and an impeccable history of teaching struggled to achieve tenure as a result of not requiring large-scale grants to support her research. Each faculty member also spoke of the narrow understanding that reduced their value to a commodity based on citations versus value of readership and contribution of knowledge to their field.

Regarding the value of curriculum, each interviewee, both faculty member and administrator, highlighted the importance of a democratic-critically informed curriculum. Helen when discussing the ‘unwashed’ shared how students now view their studies as an economic means versus a way to think more broadly, democratically, and critically of our world. As a result of recent world events at the time of this writing, surely government and universities’ must see the value in critical scholarship. When discussing the importance of pedagogy, the experience shared by Alexander warrants special attention regarding the power of the teacher evaluation, as the critique by a few should not warrant such numerical, punitive, significance.
Finally, when reflecting on my research findings, quality assurance, and accountability, it becomes important to take into consideration the experiences of senior administrators, who advocate the importance of the ‘freedoms’ as espoused by Maxine Greene, the importance of the quality of research, and the quality of the learning and teaching environment, and what each mean to the public mission of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Quoting Raymond Williams, a Welsh academic, regarding education more broadly, Apple (1979) shares, “The common prescription of education, as the key to change, ignores the fact that the form and content of education are affected, and in some cases determined, by actual systems [political] decision and [economic] maintenance” (Apple, 1979, p.28). Williams’ states that these mechanisms have been ignored and that the site of education is believed by many to be neutral, and to this I agree. However, even for those who do subscribe to the common prescription, there can be no denial that education has delivered in doses the importance of its association to the economy and has always been shrouded in a political veil, which speaks of its democratic importance. Education, thus, has always been political and economic- whether to maintain the power of the church or the class status of the ruling elites. Thus, I argue that further research is required regarding the participation of those within the university, those who continue to possess a sense of autonomy to effect change and inspire hope for others who may begin to think differently about the systems and mechanisms that have maintained dominant ideologies, powers of authentication, and privileging of certain knowledge, especially when considering the newly implemented SMA and performance based funding in Ontario. It is our moral and societal obligation in the university, to recognize the
ideology, politics, economics, culture, and significance of context that intersect within the social construction of our cultural institutions and to begin to unpack and question them.

Therefore, during this time I argue that it is greater government support, vision, and strong leadership that are required for re-setting the purpose and agency of the public university. A re-set that I am hopeful will bring into focus the importance of critical thinking, the value of empathy brought about through critically informed research and teaching, and the significance of a critical-democratic engaged citizenship that is not based on the ideologies of neoliberalism. In summary this research points to the need to revisit the original neoliberal philosophies which Brown (2019) argues have evolved in a deformed manner whereby even Hayek and the Mont Pelerin Society themselves might question this new neoliberalism, that undermines liberal freedoms and democracy. Brown (2019), highlighting the new genesis of neoliberalism and its role in education brings forward the importance of recognizing that education, “in itself is not a commodity. Education happens in human encounters that depend on care, trust, responsibility and truth, and such encounters cannot be packaged and sold” (Brown, 2019, p. 119).

For many of my participants higher education is precisely the site to begin to challenge the hegemonic notions and rationality of neoliberal power, knowledge and control. Curious to understand my own dedication to researching the university and the effects of neoliberalism, I came upon this passage written by Connell (2019) who states most emphatically, “I have stuck with universities because their capacity for challenge, critique, invention and intellectual growth survived. I think it is still alive; but it has to be fought for. That is the basic reason for this book” (p.10). Further to this, Connell asserting the importance of higher education says,
It is a university’s job to serve its society, not to agree with it. Where there are uncomfortable findings, it is the university’s job to declare them. Intellectual labour involves a constant flow of questioning and critique. That is a crucial resource for societies facing difficulty and change, feeling their way into unknown futures. A good university, inevitably, is a bearer of oppositional ideas, an obstacle to privilege (Connell, 2019, p. 173).

In concluding this study my one resounding reflection inspired by my interviewees and the recent work of Raewyn Connell (2019) is this: We are without doubt experiencing, collectively, an interesting time in the university. The purpose of this research was to examine how quality assurance and accountability policies, which are increasingly informed by neoliberalism, have come to shape the experience of the faculty members and administrators in this case study. As the massification of higher education continues it brings with it “sites of exploitation, deception, and conflict” (Connell, 2019, p. 186). Yet, the resounding reflection that I mention above is the continued hope each expressed, the love for what each participant does in the university, and the continued belief in valuing the university as a public good. This research shows that while there may be at times a ‘double speak’, that while we are ragged at our edges, there continue to be spaces for resisting the entrepreneurial vision put forth by government and non-government organizations that steer what quality assurance and accountability are to mean in the university. However, for public universities to continue their mission for the public good neoliberalism and the narrow understanding of what ‘counts’ as quality assurance and accountability must be critically engaged.

In the final pages of her book Connell writes, “Is this a big ask? Strap in for a rough ride… Other futures are possible. In practical terms, who might support a more democratic future for universities? University workers will” (2019, p.187). What Connell
(2019) champions is for university academics to join together as a collective force, to see what great resources we do in fact possess when she asserts the following:

The workers and controllers of universities hold in trust a great collective resource. This is not really bricks and mortar, nor the figures in university balance sheets. It is the vast intangible asset of organized knowledge: the archive, the investigations, the curricula, the teaching methods, the research know-how, and the situational knowledge’s and practical skills that bring the whole into existence (2019, p. 192).

Thus, bricks and mortar do not make a home, it is the people who dwell within the structure that do. If we are to resist the current narrow neoliberal path that each interviewee mentions in regard to how policies for quality assurance and accountability are understood and experienced we must remember our own fortitude, resilience, and commitment to truth that seeks to turn our work and experiences in the university from a labour for performance back into a work of love.
References


Dale, R. (1999). Specifying globalization effects on national policy: a focus on the mechanisms. Journal educational policy, 14(1), 1-17


Giroux, H. (2014). *Neoliberalism’s war on higher education*. Toronto, Canada: Between the lines.

Giroux, H.A., Oliveria Figueriredo, G., Ferraz de Siqueira, V.H., Costa da Silva, A.


Appendix A: Letter of Information and Consent

Project Title: How Do Faculty Members and Administrators Enact Policy: A Case Study on the Neoliberal Rationality in Higher Education

Letter of Information and Consent- Faculty Member/Administrator

Principal Investigator:

Professor Goli Rezai-Rashti, PhD, Faculty of Education
University of Western Ontario
1137 Western Road
London, ON N6G 1G7
T: 519-661-2111 X:88569
E: grezaira@uwo.ca

Co-Investigator:

Melanie Lawrence, PhD Candidate
University of Western Ontario
1137 Western Road
London, ON N6G 1G7
E: mmazier@uwo.ca

1. Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in this critical policy study as it seeks to explore Quality Assurance Policy in higher education. You are being asked to participate, as you are a faculty member or administrator in an institution of higher education within the following fields: Education, Social Science, Humanities or Liberal Arts. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

2. Purpose of this Study
The purpose of this policy enactment study is to investigate if policies for Quality Assurance act as mechanisms for accountability.

3. How long will you be in this study?

It is expected that you will be available to participate in this study for approximately one-hour and that there will be only one visit during your participation in this study.

4. Study Procedures

If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be asked to participate in approximately an hour long semi-structured, digitally recorded interview, which will be conducted in a mutually agreed location.

4.1 Inclusion Criteria

Faculty Members and Administrators eligible to participate in this study will be required to be from the following fields: Education, Social Science, Humanities or Liberal Arts. Each participant, in advance, will be required to agree to a digital audio-recording of their interview, which will be approximately one-hour in length. The investigators will approach each participant for his or her teaching, research and administrative experience in higher education.

4.2. Exclusion Criteria

Individuals who are not eligible to participate in this study will be those who are not a faculty member or administrator in higher education, who do not wish to be digitally audio-recorded during their interview and are not from the following fields: Education, Social Science, Humanities or Liberal Arts.

5. Possible Risks and Harms

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

6. Possible Benefits

Participants may not benefit directly from participating in this study; however, the information collected may provide benefits to society and to future research on critical policy studies in higher education.

7. Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on their future employment status. If they decide to withdraw from this study they have the right
to request withdrawal of information collected about them. If they wish to have their information removed please let the researcher know.

8. Confidentiality

All data collected will remain confidential. If the results are published, your name will not be used. *If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database.

8.1.

Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Health Sciences Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

8.2.

While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. If data is collected during the project, which may be required to report by law, we have a duty to report.

8.3.

The Principal Investigator will keep any personal information about you in a secure and confidential location for a minimum of seven-years. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept in a secure place, separate from your study file.

8.4.

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. All data archived shall be kept in a secure lock box. Only, the Principal Investigator will have access to this lock box.

8.5.

Although personal names will not be used in this study, as pseudonyms shall be employed, titles, gender and personal quotes will be used in publication.

9. Compensation

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research.

10. Rights of Participants

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right not to answer individual questions or to
withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on your employment. You do not waive any legal right by signing this consent form.

11. Whom to Contact for Questions

If you should have questions about this research study please contact the Principal Investigator:

Professor Goli Rezai-Rashti, PhD, Faculty of Education
Western University of Canada
1137 Western Road
London, ON N6G 1G7
T: 519-661-2111 X:88569
E: grezaira@uwo.ca

If you should have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, email: ethics@uwo.ca

This letter is yours to keep for future reference

12. Consent

Project Title: How do Faculty Members and Administrators Enact Policy: A Case Study on the Neoliberal Rationality in Higher Education

Written Consent

Principal Investigator:
Professor Goli Rezai-Rashti, PhD, Faculty of Education
University of Western Ontario

Co-Investigator:
Melanie Lawrence, PhD Candidate
University of Western Ontario
I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

☐ YES ☐ NO

Print Name of Participant          Signature          Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

Print Name of Person Obtaining Consent          Signature          Date (DD-MMM-YYYY)
Appendix B: Consent Form

How Do Faculty Members and Administrators Enact Policy: A Case Study on the Neoliberal Rationality in Higher Education *Melanie Lawrence*

**Project Title:** How Do Faculty Members and Administrators Enact Policy: A Case Study on the Neoliberal Rationality in Higher Education *Melanie Lawrence*

**Study Investigator’s Name:** Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participants Name (please print): __________________________________________

Participants’ Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Person obtaining Informed Consent (please print): Melanie Lawrence

Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Research Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself: What is your discipline and undergraduate/graduate experience?
2. What is your teaching philosophy?
3. How did you become interested in teaching/administration and how many years experience do you have in that role?
4. How do you conceptualize ‘quality assurance’ in higher education?
5. What is the meaning or function of quality assurance to you and in your department?
6. How do you and/or your department conceptualize ‘accountability’ in higher education? To whom do you feel accountable?
7. How is technology contributing to how ‘quality’ and ‘accountability’ is understood in higher education?
8. What are the challenges and rewards of in your career thus far?
9. How are the current methods for measuring quality and assuring accountability changing how you experience your work in higher education?
10. Do you have any comments or questions? Is there anything that you would like to tell me in addition to the questions asked?
Appendix D: Ethics Approval

Project ID: 111199

Study Title: How Faculty Members and Administrators Enact Policy: A Case Study on the Neoliberal Rationality in Higher Education

Study Short Title: How Faculty Members and Administrators Enact Policy: A Case study on the Neoliberal Rationality in Higher Education

REB Approval Expiry Date: 11/Jun/2020

Applicant Link: https://applywesternrem.uwo.ca/Project/Index/1016476
The Western University HSREB/NMREB has approved the Continuing Review Application for the above mentioned study.

Please log in to WREM to view the correspondence from the REB.

If you have any questions about the WREM System or need technical assistance please contact wrem@uwo.ca. If you have any questions about the ethical content of this application, please contact ethics@uwo.ca.

Sincerely,

The Office of Human Research Ethics

Date: 5 December 2018

To: Prof. Goli Rezai-Rashti

Project ID: 111199

Study Title: How Faculty Members and Administrators Enact Policy: A Case Study on the Neoliberal Rationality in Higher Education

Application Type: NMREB Amendment Form

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: January 11 2019

Date Approval Issued: 05/Dec/2018

REB Approval Expiry Date: 11/Jun/2019
Dear Prof. Goli Rezai-Rashti,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the amendment, as of the date noted above.

REB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion or decision.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.
Sincerely,
Kelly Patterson, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).
Curriculum Vitae

Education

Ph.D., Critical Policy, Equity, and Leadership Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
2015-2021

Master of Education (MA): Comparative  
and International Education Policy  
The University of Western Ontario  
2012-2014

Honour Specialization Sociology (HBA)  
The University of Western Ontario  
2008-2012

Work Experience

Lecturer  
The University of Western University  
2020-2021

Professor  
Fanshawe College  
2019-2020

Instructor  
The University of Western University  
2018-2019

Graduate Teaching Assistant  
The University of Western University  
2017-2018

Graduate Research Assistant  
2016-2018

Research Assistant  
King’s University College, UWO  
2015-2015

Publications


Awards

Western Graduate Scholarship Grant (WGSG)- 2019

Ontario Graduate Scholarship Grant (OGS)- 2018/2019

Conference Papers


