The Post-Truth Tyrannies of an Evidence-Based Hegemony

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Abstract: A trend towards evidence-based practice has developed in policy and practice in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia in recent years, evolving to become a powerful hegemonic force. This paper considers this latest impetus to teach according to the mandates of a narrow evidence base as a symptom of the post-truth condition, one that elevates a limited body of evidence to an infallible position. Drawing on interviews with practicing teachers and critical discourse analysis of policy texts, this paper explores the homogenizing effects of a tyrannical evidence-based movement, using Antonio Gramsci's (1971) writing on the relationship between consent, coercion, and the maintenance of cultural hegemony. This paper argues that the contemporary policy landscape obtains consent from teachers to accept its claims through a coercive paradigm built from a powerful set of hegemonic discourses, such as "what works" and "evidence-based." These discourses, this paper suggests, need to be considered within the current post-truth context, where the dismissal of research claims is akin to scientific skepticism; a dynamic that places

teachers in an impossible bind where the evidence underpinning policy is protected by a paradigm that makes it difficult to question.

Keywords: post-truth; education policy; evidence-based practice; hegemony

Las tiranías de la posverdad de una hegemonía basada en la evidencia

Resumen: En los últimos años se ha desarrollado una tendencia hacia la práctica basada en la evidencia en la política y la práctica en el Reino Unido, los EE. UU. y Australia, que ha evolucionado hasta convertirse en una poderosa fuerza hegemónica. Este artículo considera este último impulso para enseñar de acuerdo con los mandatos de una base de evidencia estrecha como un síntoma de la condición de posverdad, que eleva un cuerpo de evidencia limitado a una posición infalible. Basándose en entrevistas con docentes y análisis crítico del discurso de textos políticos, este artículo explora los efectos homogeneizadores de un movimiento tiránico basado en la evidencia, utilizando los escritos de Antonio Gramsci (1971) sobre la relación entre el consentimiento, la coerción y el mantenimiento de la hegemonía cultural. Este artículo argumenta que el panorama político contemporáneo obtiene el consentimiento de los docentes para aceptar sus afirmaciones a través de un paradigma coercitivo construido a partir de un poderoso conjunto de discursos hegemónicos, como "lo que funciona" y "basado en evidencia". Este artículo sugiere que estos discursos deben ser considerados dentro del contexto actual de la posverdad, donde el rechazo de las afirmaciones de la investigación es similar al escepticismo científico, una dinámica que coloca a los docentes en un aprieto imposible donde la evidencia que sustenta la política está protegida por un paradigma. eso hace que sea difícil de cuestionar.

Palabras clave: posverdad; política educativa; la evidencia se basa en la practica; hegemonía

As tiranias da pós-verdade de uma hegemonia baseada em evidências

Resumo: Uma tendência para a prática baseada em evidências desenvolveu-se na política e na prática no Reino Unido, Estados Unidos e Austrália nos últimos anos, evoluindo para se tornar uma poderosa força hegemônica. Este artigo considera esse último ímpeto de ensinar de acordo com os mandatos de uma base de evidências estreita como um sintoma da condição de pós-verdade, que eleva um corpo limitado de evidências a uma posição infalível. Com base em entrevistas com professores em exercício e análise crítica do discurso de textos de políticas, este artigo explora os efeitos homogeneizadores de um movimento tirânico baseado em evidências, usando a escrita de Antonio Gramsci (1971) sobre a relação entre consentimento, coerção e a manutenção de direitos culturais. hegemonia. Este artigo argumenta que o cenário político contemporâneo obtém o consentimento dos professores para aceitar suas reivindicações por meio de um paradigma coercitivo construído a partir de um poderoso conjunto de discursos hegemônicos, como 'o que funciona' e 'baseado em evidências'. Esses discursos, este artigo sugere, precisam ser considerados dentro do atual contexto pós-verdade, onde a rejeição das alegações de pesquisa é semelhante ao ceticismo científico, uma dinâmica que coloca os professores em um vínculo impossível, onde a evidência que sustenta a política é protegida por um paradigma isso torna difícil questionar.

Palavras-chave: pós-verdade; política educacional; prática baseada em evidências; hegemonia

The Post-Truth Tyrannies of an Evidence-Based Hegemony

Long before the Trump and Brexit era, Tesich (1992) published an essay that first conjured the term *post-truth*. He observed that Americans were becoming the kinds of people "totalitarian monsters could only drool about in their dreams" (p. 12). They were no longer holding themselves, each other, or those in public office to long-held expectations of honesty; the people had decided the truth did not matter. He declared that it was the American people, free and democratic, who had chosen to live in a post-truth world. Tesich's observations went largely unnoticed until more recent times, when the world began to observe the effects of a changing relationship to truth. Announced as Oxford Dictionary's word of the year in 2016, "post-truth" (BBC, 2016) became the term used to denote a litany of occurrences, including fake news, "alternative facts" and ardent skepticism around proven phenomena such as climate change (McComiskey, 2017).

Post-truth has since emerged as one of the defining social and political moments of recent times. The current sociopolitical discursive landscape is characterised by an undermining of conventional sources of truth (McIntyre, 2018) and a rise in "truth-indifferent attitudes" (Zackariasson, 2018, p. 19). A United Nations Security Council report released in July 2020 expressed concern about "scientifically baseless conspiracy theories and disinformation flourish[ing] and spread[ing] rapidly across the Internet" (p. 1), increasing polarisation, and extreme right-wing terrorist groups using conspiracy theories to attempt to "radicalize, recruit and inspire plots and attacks" (p. 2).

At the same time, paradoxically, teachers' freedom to make claims about their practice has begun to attract a higher burden of proof. Across the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, the evidence-based policy orthodoxy, which has grown steadily since the 1990s (Ladwig, 2018), emerged from a lack of trust in the effectiveness of teacher judgement and practice (Biesta, 2007), and a "crisis of legitimisation" following repeated attacks on educational practice and research (Pirrie, 2001, p 124). This is set within a globally established neoliberal policy climate (Chitpin & Portelli, 2019) defined by performativity (Ball, 1993), accountability (Kostogriz, 2012; Kostogriz & Doecke, 2011), and choice and comparison (Angus, 2015), with well-documented impacts on teachers' practice in Australia (Polesel et al., 2014), the United States (Rubin, 2011) and the United Kingdom (Goodwyn, 2012).

Ladwig (2018) argues that it is important to see the evidence-based policy phenomenon as a "social phenomenon" because its rationales are "overtly social and political" (p. 532). This paper agrees that it is crucial to view the evidence-based policy context within its broader sociopolitical context, as it offers interesting parallels, and contrasts, with diminishing public trust in experts and ongoing skepticism toward known facts. Politically, a rise in populist orientations has had significant implications for once-secure democracies, and in education, evidence-based policy positionings favoring the views of a small number of gurus have had similarly corrosive consequences (Eacott, 2017). For example, Holloway and Larsen Hedegaard (2021) write that evidence-based impositions have implications for what teachers can "do, be and become," constricting their capacity to practice freely (p. 2). Evidence-based orthodoxies also mean that teachers are compelled to defer to sources other than their own professional knowledge when planning lessons or making decisions (Wescott, 2021). Further, Biesta (2017) argues that the persistent policy preoccupation with measurement, standards, and evidence erodes education's democratic potential.

This paper considers these two emergent phenomena, the hegemonic power of the evidence-based movement in education, and the post-truth sociopolitical and discursive moment, alongside one another, as curious and confounding companions. Set in Victoria, Australia, where the empirical work of this paper took place, it examines a recent set of policy initiatives referred to as the *Victorian*

Teaching and Learning Model (VTLM) and its implications for currently-practicing teachers. The title of the paper refers to these implications as "post-truth tyrannies" for a number of reasons. Tyranny, defined as the unfair or cruel exercise of power (Oxford Dictionary, 2022), is useful to capture the power of the weight of "evidence-based" claims, enforced in ways that oppress and minimise teachers' agency, with changes to practice enforced coercively though both surveillance mechanisms and evidence-based discourses. Additionally, it can be used to describe the ways that the authority carried by evidence-based policy has established it as an unequivocal "truth," despite both teachers and scholars expressing dissent (see Aastrup Rømer, 2019; McKnight & Morgan, 2020a; Rogers, 2021; Snook et al., 2009; Wecker et al., 2017). Further, the current epistemological conditions, where misinformation and scientific skepticism thrive, mean that teachers risk alignment with evidence-skepticism if they question evidence-informed measures. In these ways, the discursive and material power of evidence-based policy looms omnipotently in both policy and practice.

Structurally, this paper first considers the brief history of the trend toward evidence-based education and the increasing clinicalisation of practice. Using a theoretical framework that draws on Gramsci's (1971) notion of the development and maintenance of cultural hegemony, it explores the nature of consent and coercion, which Gramsci argues are the necessary components for the maintenance of hegemony, in the implementation of new policy initiatives, particularly in the context of volatile epistemological conditions. Then, it employs a blend of discursive policy analysis and semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of how the policy hegemony is constructed through policy and encountered and mediated in teachers' practice.

Evidence-Based Education

A broad body of research has explored the growing trend towards evidence-based practice in Australian policymaking (e.g., Ladwig, 2018; McKnight & Morgan, 2020a, 2020b; Mockler & Stacey, 2021; Rogers, 2021) Helgetun and Menter (2020) declare that we are firmly in an "evidence era," where discourses of research and best practice inform policymaking and teacher practice. This era, they suggest, is underpinned by a "rationalised myth" (p. 2) around the efficacy and status of evidence-based practice; a discourse underpinned by an association with truth that bolsters its legitimacy. The prolificacy of the evidence-based movement in education has many possible implications for teachers, including that their practice transforms in response to what is sanctioned by evidence and what can be quantified (Mockler & Stacey, 2021). Mockler and Stacey (2021) found that teachers believed that their own observations and reflections constituted good evidence for practice; beliefs that stand at odds with what is sanctioned in policy. This gap in perspective, they argue, may reconstitute how teachers see themselves and their work, shaping knowledge and practice in the image of what is authorised as legitimate.

Education departments in the United States and the United Kingdom have also transitioned their policymaking and its associated rhetoric to evidence-based practice (Haskins & Margolis, 2014; See, 2018). In the United States, the *No Child Left Behind Act* recommended the use of practices informed by scientifically based research (Slavin, 2016). The Institution for Education Services, the "nation's leading source for rigorous, independent education research, evaluation and statistics" (U.S. Department of Education, 2022), has also promoted research based on "rigorous methods, especially randomised experiments, and using the findings. . . to guide policy and practice" (Slavin, 2016, p. 5). The Obama administration initiated the introduction of evidence-based social policies with a funding model that supported and funded programs associated with an evidence base (Haskins & Margolis, 2014). Senior policymakers in the Obama administration subscribed to the belief that randomised control trials, a form of scientific experiment that studies the efficacy of new treatments by assigning

one group to the specific intervention under study, and the other to a placebo or different treatment, provided the most reliable form of evidence, and hence, policymaking decisions were informed by studies in methodological alignment with these beliefs. In 2010, the United States began to adopt Common Core State Standards, which were research and evidence based (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013).

In the United Kingdom, the New Labour government of 1997 increased the push for evidence-based policy, initiating the beginning of the "what works" agenda after it was introduced into public consciousness in David Hargreaves's *The Teacher Training Agency* lecture in 1996 (Helgetun & Menter, 2020; See, 2018). The United Kingdom's Education Endowment Foundation developed the *Teaching and Learning Toolkit*, which provides a summary of international evidence on teaching practice, with ratings according to cost, strength of evidence and "impact," following years of attacks on educational research by media and government (Whitty, 2006). However, See (2018) found that many "evidence-based" interventions have been established on flawed evidence, with much of it weak and methodologically flawed. In 2017, the UK Department for Education released a research report evaluating the progress of the implementation of evidence-informed teaching (Department for Education, 2017). The report found that conversations in schools were becoming more research focussed, with questions about decision-making often including, "what does the evidence show?" (p. 7). Both US and UK governments have sponsored multiple initiatives to integrate evidence into teachers' practice, including the United States' What Works Clearinghouse and the United Kingdom's Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre (Slavin, 2016).

In the Australian context, education policy since the early 1980s has responded to broader policy trends of marketisation and neoliberalism (Connell, 2013), forces that have had profound impacts on social and economic policy (Western et al., 2007) and schooling (Davies & Bansel, 2007). Australian schooling policymaking has seen the effects of the local adoption of global policies, a phenomenon referred to as "policy-borrowing" (Lingard, 2010). Rogers (2003) argues that evidence-based rhetoric borrowed from the UK was "ripe for adaptation in Australia" (p. 67). This, as well as the combination of market logics and constant schooling reform, has seen regulation and standardisation become policymaking constants (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2018). In the early 2000s, the federal Labor government introduced a range of nationalisation reforms, including standardised testing regimes (the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN]), a nationalised curriculum, a central reporting authority (the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority), and a centralised website for the reporting of data on school demographics and performance (My School) (Lingard, 2010). These new policy technologies are now established features of the Australian schooling system (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

Following these developments, researchers have observed that the belief in the absolute supremacy of science is reflected in the contemporary deployment of research knowledge as a resource to produce policy (Welch, 2015). Policymaking reliance on evidence-based rhetoric also precludes the possibility of problematizing evidence, and rejects research that does not comply with its methodological prescription (Welch, 2015). These contemporary policymaking trends contribute to a restrictive and uncritical understanding of evidence (Malone & Hogan, 2020). There are also concerns around the veracity of particular "research-based" orthodoxies in policy and practice. Claims, for example, of a "consensus" around the efficacy of choice-based schooling thrives without reliable evidence (Lubienski et al., 2009). Lubienski et al. (2009) argue that these consensus claims reveal new paradigms of research-sharing, where despite compelling evidence, advocates of particular policies and reforms amass significant power in convincing policymakers that their research meets quality standards. Further, Lubienski et al. (2009) point out that the notion of research "consensus"

functions as a powerful rhetoric that accelerates the power of particular research in policy conversations.

The Clinicalisation of Practice

The use of diagnostic language and a clinical model of practice in the Victorian Department of Education and Training's (DET) recent initiatives signals an adaptation of not only evidence-based rhetoric, but also a medical-inspired clinical approach to teaching and learning. Several models of clinical teaching training exist across the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia, including the Oxford Internship Scheme, US Professional Development Schools, and Melbourne University's Master of Clinical Teaching (Burn & Mutton, 2015). The Melbourne University version, write McLean Davies et al. (2015), is underpinned by the notion that "teaching is a clinical profession," requiring teachers to assess student learning "and provide appropriate interventions" (p. 96). Teachers, they suggest, must also be "expert in gathering evidence and using sound clinical judgement" (p. 96).

Despite the parallels with medical practice, Burn and Mutton (2015) argue that the concept of clinical education is "potentially ambiguous" (p. 218). The "clinical" component refers to the process of learning to hone and refine skills, which practicing teachers undertake not only during their education, but also throughout their careers. McKnight and Morgan (2020b) argue that the underpinning tenets of clinical practice, including the gathering of evidence, have always been central to teaching practice, and so it remains unclear what additional features the word "clinical" contributes to teachers' work (p. 88). However, Kriewaldt and Turnidge (2013) contend that the development of clinical reasoning is central to competent practice, and functions to dispel the myth that teachers are "born and not made" (p. 104). It is a "cognitive process," they suggest, that enables teachers to use data to make a diagnosis and assign an intervention (p. 104). They describe the clinical approach as "deprivatising pedagogy" (p. 105), where teacher decision-making is made visible and explicit, and deliberately moves away from notions of teaching as craftwork. The use of evidence and data is therefore central to practitioners working in both medicine and education (Kriewaldt & Turnidge, 2013). Dinham (2013) argues that educational change and improvement will be driven by clinical interventionist-style practice, an approach that must also be assisted by schools and leaders who should guide the transformation in thinking and practice.

Theoretical Framework: Hegemonic Policymaking

This paper draws on the work of political and social theorist Antonio Gramsci, whose writing on cultural hegemony informs an understanding of how "truth" is established in policy and practice. Gramsci (1971) theorised civil society as composed of knowledge and culture disseminated and entrenched by government, religious, and social institutions who ruled social and cultural realms. These dominant, normalised and prolific knowledges and cultural customs form the hegemony of a society—the beliefs, values and ideas that are broadly accepted as unequivocally true. Modern civilisation, Gramsci believed, is maintained by the functions of hegemony—through "cultural organisations, political movements and educational institutions" that enforce a particular version of the world through a balance of coercion and consent (Borg et al., 2002, p. 8).

Gramsci wrote prolifically on education as an essential feature of the state, acting as a moral regulator through its ideological institutions (Mayo, 2015a). Its aim, he wrote, is to build new types of civilisation, and to adapt the civilisation and morality of populations to ensure continuous economic growth and productivity (Gramsci, 1971). He also theorised that education plays a central role in

cementing the existing cultural hegemony, and in eliciting consent for the way of life established by ruling elites (Mayo, 2015b). Within this framework, contemporary educational hegemonies can be understood as mechanisms to procure consent and to enact coercion, working to maintain or subvert cultural hegemony in schools. Gramsci's work provides an essential framing to the ways that dominant approaches, language, and ideas around teaching and learning, or "truths," are introduced and upheld in educational spaces.

Gramsci's (1971) perspective on consent and coercion offers that "force and consent are simply equivalent" (p. 271). In an educational context, this equation is underpinned by discourses of "what works," "impact," and "improvement-focussed approaches" that compel teachers to adopt measures in the ongoing pursuit of advancement and achievement. The DET's new suite of policy initiatives draws on coercive paradigms, such as evidence- and clinical-based teaching, and attempts the construction of a shared, collective consciousness around morals and values in order to build a cohesive understanding of practice across the state. The thematic consistencies throughout the DET's documentation indicates the strategic building of a policy hegemony, where evidence-based practice and data-informed decision-making are accepted uncritically, and contested research methodologies, such as meta-analysis, draw on the cultural capital of scientific discourse for coercive effect. It is suggested in this paper, that the implicit weight of cultural understandings of evidence-based paradigms hold a coercive power over teachers working in schools that commit enthusiastically to new policy initiatives. Further, accountability mechanisms and the enshrinement of policy and research trends such as evidence-based practice in policy texts enforce the illusion of a "popular consent" (Murray & Worth, 2013, p. 733), a tool of the maintenance of cultural hegemony, among teachers.

Methodology: A Study of Policy and Practice

This paper blends a discursive analysis of a suite of new policy initiatives—the *Victorian Teaching and Learning Model* (*VTLM*)—ratified and implemented by the DET in Victoria, Australia, with the perspectives of five teachers working within that policy context. The new model signals the endorsement of an evidence-based paradigm, with each component explicitly connected to an evidence base, drawing on a canon of contemporary educational literatures and texts—in particular, the meta-analysis work of researcher John Hattie (2009, 2012).

The use of policy initiatives is central to understanding the establishment of a cultural hegemony in contemporary teaching practice. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2013a, 2015) is used to examine the "discursive character" of policy (Fairclough, 2013b, p. 178) to study the intersections of language and power in the establishment and maintenance of policy hegemonies. CDA, with its focus on discursive power, is employed to critically examine the function of language and discourse in procuring consent for hegemonic ideas about teaching and learning. Through CDA, this paper examines both "discursive practices, events and texts," such as the rise of evidence-based clinical teaching; and "wider social and cultural structures, relationships and processes," such as post-truth (Fairclough, 1993, p. 135).

This paper also draws on accounts of working within current policy conditions from five practicing teachers (pseudonyms have been used for each participant): Sarah, Joel, Phil, Kate, and Emma. These teachers were recruited using existing networks on social media platforms Twitter and Facebook. All five teachers work in the government school system in the metropolitan region of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, and have varying levels of experience and responsibility. The paper features perspectives from Sarah, who has been teaching for 10 years, and alongside her English class load, holds a position of responsibility in curriculum and coaching; Joel, an English teacher of six

years; Phil, an English and literacy improvement teacher with 10 years' experience; Kate, an English teacher with 10 years' experience; and Emma, an English teacher of five years. Teachers participated in hour-long semi-structured interviews, responding to questions about the implementation of the new DET initiatives at their school, their professional positions in relation to these policies, and any tensions that have emerged through their implementation.

New Policy Initiatives: Building a Hegemony

The Victorian DET's launch of the suite of new policy initiatives in 2018 signalled a decisive endorsement of a policy direction steeped in a clinical, evidence-based paradigm. This section provides an overview, description, and critical discourse analysis of the components of these initiatives, drawing on Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony to explain how the DET has established a cohesive and homogenous orthodoxy for teacher practice in Victoria. It also draws on teachers' perspectives of working in these new policy conditions as a way of understanding the "consent" element of Gramsci's theory of the establishment and maintenance of hegemony. The five teachers whose accounts are featured below—Sarah, Joel, Phil, Kate, and Emma—speak to two key interruptions to their practice: the introduction of pedagogical models and the requirement to draw on clinical paradigms, specifically, data-informed knowledges. Combining this policy analysis with teacher perspectives, this section argues that the DET has built an impenetrable hegemony of evidence-based rationalities, neutralising what is an ideologically contestable paradigm and offering it as objective and certain.

What Works: The Victorian Teaching and Learning Model

The DET's *Victorian Teaching and Learning Model* is composed of four elements: A *Vision for Learning*, a *Pedagogical Model*, *Practice Principles*, and *High Impact Teaching Strategies* (*HITS*). The purpose of the model, writes the DET (2020e), is to drive improvement initiatives by encouraging teachers to make "evidence-based decisions." The clinical, evidence-based sentiment is emphasised throughout each of the four elements, not only in its instructional language but also in the "evidence base," specifically provided for each element in an accompanying text box. The DET's *Vision for Learning* states its purpose is to help teachers and leaders "create a unified set of values and beliefs," provide a "frame of reference" for teachers to evaluate their practice, and align their practice with the vision's "core values and beliefs" (DET, 2020f). This statement indicates that the DET's intention in these initiatives is not only to introduce a cohesive approach to teaching and learning, but also to instill a shared consciousness around the core purposes of practice.

Teachers in this study raised particular concerns about the implementation of the *Pedagogical Model* aspect in their schools, particularly around the requirement to use learning intentions (explicit learning aims or outcomes for a lesson). Typically, learning intentions form part of a school's complete pedagogical model, and may also be connected to success criteria (markers for students to assess their understanding of the lesson's intentions). However, implementation methodologies occurring in some schools trouble the possibility that their implementation is meaningfully accepted by teachers. Teachers described coercive leadership practices that surveilled their use of pedagogical models, leading to an acquiescence that significantly compromised teachers' practice philosophies.

Sarah shared a story about her school's leadership team performing observations of classes to ensure that teachers are conforming to policy implementations, including the requirement to make components of their pedagogical model visible in classrooms at all times. Sarah admits that this surveillance has meant that "people have just accepted that that's [learning intentions] a thing that we do." This acceptance could be interpreted as consent achieved through coercion, with leadership

surveillance of teachers' use of the model complicating whether teachers legitimately accept the utility of this aspect of teaching, or whether it is undertaken in the knowledge of leadership observation. Similarly, Kate described the requirement that learning intentions and success criteria, elements of her school's pedagogical model, must be made visible on their school's Compass[1] portal within a lesson plan template. Kate's leadership team sent an email to staff claiming that "some of our lesson plans were not good enough." Attached to the email, Kate says, was "a 5-page document of what a lesson plan should look like, modelled off the e5 model."[2] Kate's eventual acquiescence to leadership's request that she document her lesson plans according to the pedagogical model has meant a significant sacrifice to the ethos of her practice:

> It's just changed my practice from being something that I think is fit for purpose, to
> something that I think is stupid, but I have to do it anyway for compliance. Ah,
> which I find quite frustrating because I know it's a waste of time.

Similarly, Emma recounted her school running a whole-staff professional development session on setting up lesson plans and learning tasks on Compass to ensure uniformity and consistency across all classes. Both Kate and Emma therefore reported pressure from leadership to implement this evidence-based initiative in a particular way, with profound effects on their daily practice, culminating in lessened meaning and purpose.

These accounts raise questions around whether teachers yielding to the demands of evidence-based policy initiatives can be considered consenting to them. The coercive force of surveillance by leadership, and mandated visibility in classrooms and on Compass provides the illusion of a practice hegemony across teaching staff, but this hegemony is built upon staff complying with directives despite philosophical opposition to the DET initiative's purpose and uses. Staff "just accepting" and "just do[ing] it anyway for compliance" suggests the sacrifice teachers make for compliance with hegemonic trends, and denies opportunities for them to question the efficacy of the initiatives they are required to use.

Phil offers a different perspective, with teachers at his school given autonomy to design their own pedagogical model. He describes their version as "very loosey goosey," admitting that "it doesn't mention any of that Hattie stuff or anything autocratic." He attributes this teacher autonomy to a research-literate leadership, which has meant that "you just don't end up with this stupid, um, learning intention stuff that you might expect." In contrast, Sarah describes how these same initiatives can be implemented meaninglessly at her school, with a profound impact on practice:

> If you're in a school where you're told the effect size of an exact skill, then you're
> going to be teaching to that skill even if you know that there's something more
> important the kids need to be doing. And if you are told that you have to use *HITS*
> in all of your lesson plans then of course that's getting in the way of you just
> choosing, like your decision-making is not being driven by the needs of the students;
> it's being driven by the Department. And that's a problem.

This provides an instance of the coercive impact of "effect size" and evidence-based *HITS* discourses that privilege the use of particular practices over those a teacher might think more suitable for their students. Sarah admits that if a study shows that a particular intervention is useful, she is happy to use it, whereas if it becomes mandated, and then "you're told that everyone in every class has to have a group task [for example]—that's ridiculous." Sarah's view suggests that the mandated implementation of initiatives based on effect sizes comes at the expense of meaning and purpose in

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[1] A learning management system.
[2] The DET's instructional lesson plan model: engage, explore, explain, elaborate, evaluate.

teachers' practice, sacrificing nuance and ambiguity when things are implemented for the sake of building a cohesive hegemony.

The DET's guide to the *Practice Principles* document provides a particularly explicit insight into how its initiatives are intended to build cohesion and homogeneity in practice. The *Practice Principles*, writes the DET (2020c), "provide powerful evidence-based support" for teaching practice, drawing from a "substantial knowledge base" (p. 6)—meaning DET-sourced and sanctioned research evidence, rather than teacher knowledge. The *Practice Principles* enable a "cohesive view of effective teaching and learning," help to "build consensus around our moral purpose," and "support the development of a shared language for teaching and learning" (DET, 2020c, p. 6). The invocations of cohesion, "consensus," and a shared "moral purpose" are particularly coercive, with explicit use of language that recruits teachers to a mutual vision of teaching and learning. The intention to develop a "shared language" for teaching practice is an overt admission of the intention behind the DET's own use of repeated phrases in describing teaching and learning in its documentation. This "shared language," it can be assumed by the language employed by the DET throughout its documentation, is the language of evidence-based practice, drawing on clinical rationalities and cycles of intervention and inquiry. The *Practice Principles*, the DET (2020c) explains, are based on a "substantial body of knowledge" (p. 6) about effective teaching and "what works" (p. 8). The reference again to a "substantial body of knowledge" or "knowledge base" aligns with the creation of a "shared language" of drawing on particular types of knowledge to make decisions in practice.

The invocation of the "what works" discourse is a particularly potent nod to the epistemological position of the DET's new policy initiatives. "What works" has become a ubiquitous claim in education, employed by U.S. Department of Education's *What Works Clearinghouse*, a centralised repository for educational research, and also associated with Hattie's *Visible Learning* hub, introduced after the publication of his meta study *Visible Learning* (2009). Hattie has also published a text titled *What Works Best in Education: The Politics of Collaborative Expertise* (2015). The "what works" discourse signifies the possibility and the existence of absolute truths in education; that educators can ascertain what is fundamentally effective for all students across all contexts. It precludes the reasonable practice of intellectual conventions such as questioning or doubt, suggesting instead that it is possible, and reasonable, to make definitive claims. "What works" therefore functions as a particularly coercive discourse, conflating its claims with known and irrefutable truths. Teachers consenting to sharing the DET's views on "what works" do so while operating within a consensus of the efficacy of research-based orthodoxies that govern our post-Enlightenment understandings of science and knowledge. To challenge "what works" is therefore to challenge the established principles of trusting expert knowledge and scientific principles, and to undermine teachers' own knowledge paradigms within which they teach and learn.

Clinical and Data-Informed Practice

The *Teaching and Learning Model*'s consistent adoption of language of clinical practice is particularly explicit in its guide to implementing the *Practice Principles*. In particular, *Principle 6: Rigorous assessment practices and feedback inform teaching and learning*, and *Principle 7: Evidence-based strategies drive professional practice improvement* demonstrate this endorsement of clinical practice. The "Actions and indicators" underpinning *Principle 6* feature a substantial focus on data collection and interpretation, such as "Teachers use data to diagnose student learning needs" and "Teachers analyse student achievement data to improve their practice" (DET, 2020c, p. 24). *Principle 7*'s theory of action states when teachers use evidence-based strategies, "they are more precise and purposeful in their practice" (p. 26) Actions and indicators within this principle stipulate that teachers "evaluate the impact of

teaching on learning by analysing multiple sources of data" and "draw on current research and use an inquiry improvement cycle" (p. 26).

The DET indicates here the implementation of routines of data-based decision-making, diagnosis, and intervention. McLean Davies et al. (2015) refer to this medical discourse as a "new paradigm" in how teachers conceptualise and practice their work (p. 515). McKnight and Morgan (2020d) argue however that the clinical paradigm is in fact not new, and has been impinging on education practice since early in the twentieth century. In the DET's *Practice Principles* we can observe the enforcement of this new paradigm as an emergent hegemony, one that enforces particular routines for teachers' decision-making, judgement, and practice. While aspects of a clinical model of practice, such as the collection of data sources, are inherent to teachers' daily practice, teacher accounts featured in this paper suggest that quantitative forms of data are privileged over teacher-gathered data. Further, the DET's explicit insertion of this clinical paradigm in its policy initiatives augments and legitimises the authority of this model and its hegemony across Victorian schools, problematizing the possibility of teacher dissent to this mode of practice. While Kriewaldt and Turnidge (2013) suggest that a more clinical approach to teaching is "derivatizing pedagogy" (p. 105), making teaching more visible and transparent to both leadership and other staff, teacher perspectives in this paper challenge this idea, indicating that the enforcement of these clinical strategies is more coercive than liberating for their practice.

What emerged from the empirical work of this research is the existence of a hierarchy of knowledge established in schools according to clinical models. This hierarchy demotes teacher-gathered knowledge to the status of unreliable anecdotal information, subservient to the "objective" and "neutral" quantitative Big Data. One of the most frequently recurring themes in the interview data of this study was the tyrannical presence of Big Data rationalities seeping into teachers' daily practice. Data forms part of the broader clinicalisation of practice, with teachers compelled to draw on external sources of information to make inferences and claims about student learning. Teachers in this study reflected on the framing of quantifiable knowledge as superior to their own preferred sources of data collection, or the incidental data they collect during lessons. Below, Sarah explains the accuracy inherently assumed in Big Data, such as NAPLAN data, and the assumed inaccuracy of teacher-gathered anecdotal data:

> We look at things like NAPLAN because they're big, and go, well that must be more accurate. Um, and we look at anecdotal data as being the least accurate, which, you know if this was medicine, then correct, big national studies are better than an anecdote about your friend who was sick that time. But, in teaching, it should be flipped around where the anecdote of the kid that you know personally is actually a far more accurate representation of that kid than their NAPLAN score. NAPLAN's not better information about an individual, it's better information about the state or the country. Like, if I used my class to say, "Well, I've taught year 8s so I know what year 8s are like across Australia," that would be rubbish.

Here, Sarah indicates a product of the clinicalisation of practice, where large-scale data are considered to be more accurate and more reliable than the intimate knowledge of student learning garnered through classroom interaction. Her comparison here to medical paradigms indicates her awareness of the relationship between the two fields, and how the impact of borrowing from medical paradigms is influencing how teacher knowledge is perceived.

A similar paradigm is described below by Joel, who reflects on the emergent trend in education where "everything has to be quantified." He admits:

> I kind of get it to a point. Like I understand, you know when we talk about how do you. . . how do you read the room or how do you know how a student's going. . . . There's got to be some kind of quantitative element to you figuring that out, like especially with reading the room, it's not just some magical thing that happens.

Here, Joel concedes that quantitative data has a place in affirming or legitimising the work that teachers do, which could otherwise be dismissed as some "magical thing" in a policy paradigm where teacher acts have to be explicit and "visible." Below, Joel captures the entrapments of a binary between data enthusiasm and data resistance, rejecting the stereotype that English teachers don't know how to use data in their practice. He argues:

> I can use data if I really need to. I can use data to verify what I think, but what I've always found is, using data to verify what I think about a class pretty much tells me what I already knew about the class beforehand, just without the numbers.

Here, Joel contends that data's value is in confirming what he already knows about his students; a form of data captured and collected through daily, incidental practice, rather than what might be described as a more "clinical" approach. Sarah, too, finds the nuance here of balancing an understanding of clinical modes of practice with her own philosophical approach:

> This whole idea that everything has to be like, clinical or evidence-based or that we need data and we need to measure effect sizes and it's this cycle of diagnosis and implementation and assessment that. . . in some ways makes a lot of sense to me because I like the idea that we actually find out, like have something we are trying to do and find out if we've done it. . . that makes sense to me. Whereas new stuff seems to be like: "We've fixed it. We've found the thing that works for all kids." And that worries me a bit.

These perspectives reveal incidents of teachers conceding to the presence of data in the practice, and at the same time, trying to hold on to and advocate for their own judgement mechanisms. However, within this new paradigm, where data and clinical rationalities are imposed as the most accurate and efficacious forms of judgement, Joel describes that the question that always lies beneath the surface of the use of teacher judgement is: "But where's the proof?" He explains:

> All the proof is in. . . the proof is in the work that they do. . . it might be, and that it's quantitative to a degree. . . you know in English, an essay is technically quantitative because, you know, it's words on the page. . . . But it's also the professional judgement of teachers who spent years honing their craft to be able to see things without having to spend days and days and days collecting data, crunching the numbers, putting it together.

The DET (2020a) has also compiled a list of *High Impact Teaching Strategies*, gathered from "findings of tens of thousands of studies on what has worked in classrooms" (p. 5). These strategies are promised to "reliably" increase the effectiveness of practice when applied in the classroom (p. 5). They are described as "high impact, evidence-based strategies" based on research conducted by John Hattie and Robert Marzano determining the effect size of particular practices (p. 5). The DET's guide to *HITS* provides a text box explaining what an effect size is, stating that it "allows us to move

beyond questions about whether an intervention worked," to "questions about how well an intervention worked" (p. 5). Drawing on the appeal of commonality and homogeneity, the DET writes that *HITS* provide "a common language to use in planning, monitoring and reflecting on classroom practice" (p. 7). Each of the 10 *HITS* is explained alongside its related effect size. For example, *HIT* number one, "setting goals," is connected to related effect sizes "Goals – 0.56" and "Teacher clarity – 0.75." Some *HITS* are also linked to "Months of progress"—for example, *HIT* number eight, "feedback," is associated with +8 months of learning progress, determined by a research reported by *Evidence for Learning* (2017).

The DET's *HITS* document reflects again the preoccupation with clinical rationalities and the language of certainty. It again introduces the "what works" trope, a signal to the existence of known certainties and reliable research outcomes. The *HITS* claim to "reliably" increase the effectiveness of practice wherever they are applied, allowing teachers to wonder only *how well* something works rather than wondering if it worked at all. Framing teacher practice as "interventions" also draws on clinical rationalities, with questions of practice framed as problems in need of assured action, rather than contemplation and inquiry. The DET again refers to the introduction of a "common language" of practice, indicating the intention to homogenise the discourses of teacher practice.

These inclusions, however, fail to acknowledge the documented fallibilities of meta-analysis studies in educational research (Aastrup Rømer, 2019; Bergeron & Rivard, 2017; Simpson, 2017; Snook et al., 2009; Terhart, 2011; Wecker et al., 2017). These policymaking decisions rely on the assumption that greater effect sizes indicate greater significance; however, Simpson (2017) explains that this assumption is not necessarily accurate, and effects are not generalisable. Snook et al. (2009) warn that meta-analysis has reductive effects on understanding the complex interplays of factors that contribute to student learning. Further, in a critique of the theoretical foundations of Hattie's work, Aastrup Rømer (2019) argues that Hattie's conceptual work on feedback is "philosophically empty" (p. 598), with the potential to "transform a country's educational activities into a large hierarchical and data-driven organism" (p. 597). Despite these concerns, effect sizes are incorporated into the DET's evidence base as a coercive mechanism, drawing on the potency of scientific rationalities to construct a veneer of absolute truths.

The extent to which teachers must acquiesce to clinical rationalities, argues Phil, comes down to individual school leadership, whether they "fetishise graphs and data and spreadsheets, spreadsheets and scatter plots, and all those sorts of things and how much they actually just trust a teacher standing up and saying, 'Here's what I do and here is why I do it.'" Kate describes that for some teachers, data "is internalised as being the truth." But, for greater accuracy and nuance in practice, she argues, "We really have to get away from the notion that any number that someone says to you can't be interpreted five different ways." Emma rejects the contemporary Big Data paradigm, based on the premise that she "[doesn't] think it's quality data at all." However, she concedes, "I don't necessarily know what's a better way to collect data other than anecdotally that feeling you get in the classroom. That innate feeling that these kids get it."

In the paragraph above, teachers describe their own practice truths coming up against data orthodoxies. Phil's observation that graphs and data are "fetishised" in education challenges the possibility of a teacher, in contemporary practice, describing the underpinning philosophy of their practice in the absence of supportive quantitative data. Similarly, Kate captures the internalisation of these data rationalities, where teachers accept quantitative forms of information as "truth," therefore eliminating the possibility of a teacher perspective entering this epistemological paradigm. Emma's description of her practice being based in "feeling," the "innate feeling" that her students "get it," is

an invisible and unquantifiable method of practice that fails to sit within the DET-sanctioned practice methodologies that privilege what can be seen and measured.

Alongside its new *Teaching and Learning Model*, the DET has also introduced an initiative titled *Professional Learning Communities* (*PLCs*). The DET (2020d) explains that *PLCs* are an approach to school improvement where "groups of teachers work collaboratively. . . to improve student outcomes." Like the other initiatives, the DET (2020d) describes this initiative as "proven," and provides an evidence base to underpin this claim. The inquiry cycle on which *PLCs* are structured requires the collection of evidence, identifying a "problem," finding strategies, and reviewing practice. The DET's (2020d) rationale for *PLCs* is centreed on the creation of a "culture" that is focussed on continuous improvement. The elements of collective consciousness underpinning this initiative continue in its 10 principles, which include "collective responsibility" and "collective efficacy," and it is also mandated that teachers' participation must be "evidence driven" (DET, 2020d) In *PLC* schools, writes the DET (2019), teachers follow a process of "diagnosing student learning needs," "implementing teaching responses," and then evaluating and reflecting on their "interventions." In this initiative, the same key themes emerge: teachers working collectively in the same paradigms, clinical models of practice, and the invocation of certain, absolute discourses around the efficacy of its policies.

PLCs, in their use of a clinical model of practice that involves diagnosis, treatment/intervention, and review, conform to a "causal model of professional action" (Biesta, 2007, p. 7), whereby professionals (teachers) intervene and administer a remedy in order to produce a particular, predictable result (i.e., improved learning outcomes). In the DET's initiatives, *PLCs* are the final offering in the cementation of a clinical approach to practice, and one that most closely resembles a medicalised model of teacher practice. Considering evidence-based practice or clinical teaching models are becoming such a behemoth, and so elevated beyond critical questioning, there is very little discourse available to teachers where they can oppose an evidence-based model. Teachers' cultural framing dictates that evidence is unbiased and rigorous, and to question evidence is to question scientific models of discovery and lean into post-truth paradigms of relativity and scepticism.

Building Popular Consent

This section has described the DET's new suite of policy initiatives, and argues that it draws on coercive paradigms, such as evidence- and clinical-based teaching, shared, collective consciousness, and popular rhetoric such as "what works." The thematic consistencies throughout the DET's documentation indicates the strategic building of a policy hegemony, where evidence-based practice and data-informed decision-making are accepted uncritically, and contested research methodologies such as meta-analysis draw on the cultural capital of scientific discourse for coercive effect. The invocation of evidence-based rationalities is employed in the DET's policy initiatives to attempt to establish a "popular consent" (Murray & Worth, 2013, p. 733) by drawing on paradigms that attract "universal validity" (Mayo, 2015b, p. xi).

This policy initiative suite attempts to build a values and beliefs hegemony into teacher practice across the state. It marks an endeavour to build a cohesive state through the sharing of world views, and the construction of a "popular consciousness" (Murray & Worth, 2013, p. 733) in order to augment a hegemony. Providing an outline of shared "core values," intended as a "frame of reference" for teachers, through DET documentation, mandates the establishment of a shared consciousness across teaching staff, and officiates a popular worldview. In this overview, the DET makes clear the purposes of the new policy initiative documents, in proposing a shared vision for the practice of teaching throughout the state. This is a coercive move that draws on the presiding power

of the DET to set the tone, standards, and approaches to practice through the moulding of teachers' ethical and epistemological positionings. It makes way for the DET to then introduce the core thematic underpinning of its policy initiative suite, evidence- and clinical-based teaching.

Teachers' accounts in this section signify the realities of working in dynamics where narrow evidence-base rhetoric is held up as an irrefutable truth-telling source. The tyrannical effects of this dynamic, surveilling practice to ensure compliance, adapting practice to fit within rigid practice models, and teacher knowledge sidelined in favour of externally-collected data sources, indicate the emergence of a practice hegemony that erases the nuances of teaching work. The DET policy initiatives work to introduce certainty and predictability around clinical models and data modalities; however, the teachers in this paper challenge the possibility of assured truths in practice, speaking instead of binaries, nuance, and paradox. The pressure to consent to the presence of these policy initiatives in practice is underpinned by the coercive force of an authoritative evidence-based paradigm that directly undermines the embodied experience of classroom practice. Fundamentally, these teacher perspectives indicate the complexities of working alongside a policy hegemony promoting and invoking assurance and certainty in an increasingly polarised sociopolitical landscape, and stress the importance of the insertion of teacher voice in policy rhetoric.

Tyrannies of Evidence-Based Practice in the Post-Truth Era

In the context of newly implemented DET policy initiatives, the mandates to teach according to a narrow evidence-base elevates a small canon of researchers to the status of supreme knowers and truth-tellers. In a post-truth paradigm, dismissal of research claims is akin to scientific scepticism, a betrayal of intellectual ethics of teacher practice, placing teachers in an impossible bind where the evidence, despite questions about its efficacy, is protected by a discursive paradigm that makes it impossible to question. While post-truth rationalities minimise the weight of expert perspectives and undermine traditional sources of truth, these accounts capture the unique position of education in this landscape—an undermining of expert practitioner knowledge in favour of clinical rationalities and externally-sourced expert knowledge.

In a post-truth climate, where hyper-polarisation and demands for absolutes has necessitated a rhetorical landscape devoid of tone and shade, these teacher perspectives sit uneasily alongside the DET's evidence-based rationalities. Their accounts centre the multiple truths contained in practice, in knowledge, and the necessity of speaking philosophically, and with greater attention to the impossibilities of obtaining absolute truths in teaching practice. Teachers' anecdotes about working with data illuminate the ways teachers are working with multiple truths at once; that quantitative data can be both useful *and* prohibitive, and that evidence-based initiatives can have merit but be implemented tokenistically. They describe working in oppressive cultures, where quantitative data forms mandated practices of knowledge collection in schools, and teachers continue to work to find ways to blend their own knowledges within these mandated forms. Further, the impetus to use data-informed decision-making means a higher burden of proof is required for teachers to make claims about student learning, and the surveilled implementation of practices pledged as evidence-based and therefore backed by a powerful and coercive rhetoric result in teacher acquiescence at the expense of authentic consent.

The complexity of making truth claims in a post-truth era has coincided with these increased demands for truth and certainty in education. Policy hegemonies built into schools coerce teachers into consenting to the imposition of initiatives such as pedagogical models and clinical practices. This consent is obtained through the coercive paradigm of a powerful set of discourses, such as "what works" and "evidence-based," which function to procure consent via the development of a

shared consciousness, or a shared worldview. Gramsci's (1971) claim that "force and consent are simply equivalent" (p. 271) holds particularly true in these teachers' accounts, where although they are bound by an ethical code to hold faith in research-based reasoning, surveilled implementation of policy initiatives and an inability to authentically voice critique in their settings has resulted in a coercive hegemony.

In order to achieve a greater harmony between policy initiative implementation and the valuing of teacher knowledge, the impenetrable reverence for evidence-based policy and clinical rationalities needs to be dismantled. Critique of these paradigms should not be aligned with a post-truth condition that has witnessed the rise of research denialism and scientific scepticism, but might instead be seen as the practice of informed critique in the spirit of intellectual rigour and democratic engagement. As reported in the literature in this paper, the medical model of evidence-based practice to which education looks as a holy grail of knowledge and truth-telling is less fixed and infallible than is imagined by those who draw upon it as a policymaking prophecy. Future policymaking directions may instead consider best practice as a culmination of disparate and diverse tools and perspectives, rather than a coercive, impermeable manufactured shared consciousness.

Acknowledgements

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