Making sense of the impact agenda in UK higher education

A case study of Preventing Violent Extremism policy in schools

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- Higher education accountability systems are incorporating impact into their metrics.
- On one hand, measuring impact may justify social science educators' commitment to contribute beyond academia.
- On the other hand, the accountability agenda may also distort academic research.
- Social science educators in academia may draw on multiple roles to secure impacts whilst gaining recognition.

Purpose: This article explores the policy context in the UK around securing impact from academic research, particularly from the perspective of a social science education researcher.
Approach: The article locates impact studies within debates about broader accountability frameworks. Insights from this literature are applied to a case study about Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) policy.
Findings: Linear models of 'impact' are problematic for social science education researchers (especially (ex) school teachers) for several reasons. First, research and impact may be intertwined, especially in broader development work with practitioners. Second, impact in schools and on learners is often difficult to measure. Third, it is not always clear how the research contributes to impact, as opposed to other roles or activities in professional communities.
Implications: Formal impact case studies for institutional evaluation are likely to provide only a partial account of the myriad impacts (and attempts to secure impact) of a researcher

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1 Introduction: The impact agenda in higher education

For many of us working in higher education, a key part of our motivation is to achieve some benefit to society, to make the world a better place, in other words to achieve some positive impact. This broader motivation persists, even in a climate where academics are encouraged to invest significant amounts of their time and effort on high status, peer reviewed academic journal publications, which are rarely read outside academia. Many senior academics rationalise this by perceiving the narrow focus on academic outputs as a means to an end – the process through which one achieves a position (Professor, Head of Department etc.) from which to create what Doyle calls 'real world' impact (Doyle, 2018). Others, such as those involved in initial teacher education, often straddle the practice / research divide by undertaking practitioner research, and so prioritise research that only serves their day to day work with teachers and schools (Swennen et al., 2017). This article is concerned with how education academics, and in particular social science education researchers, in a university context can engage with the generic accountability systems in place in the UK. The analysis proceeds in four stages. This first section outlines and critiques the UK's higher education system for evaluating impact as part of the neoliberal reform agenda. The second section introduces arguments from public sector scholars who theorise how lecturers and teachers can subvert elements of this agenda, especially those that sit ill at ease with their professional practices and values. The third section returns to the question of impact to consider how some have attempted to subvert, re-define, or expand the restrictive definitions in policy. The final section discusses one example of a social science education researcher's attempts to construct an impact case study that strikes a balance between the restrictive requirements of policy and the broader aspirations of the practitioner. The purpose of the article is to explore how these broader debates about impact can illuminate the general question of how one achieves that basic urge to make a positive contribution, and to assess the extent to which policy about higher education impact can provide a vehicle for such accounts.

Alongside those personal motivations to have a positive impact, governments also have an interest in ensuring that academic research has a beneficial impact on society. As a consequence, in the UK an accountability framework for higher education research has evolved from a primary focus on the quality of research, to a broader assessment of how the research secures an impact. UK universities have been assessed since 1986 for the quality of their research, under a regime called the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), and in 2014 this process was expanded to include measures of impact. The newly re-named Research Evaluation Framework (REF) included 'impact' as 20% of the overall outcome for units of assessment.[1] This has been estimated to translate into a financial award of up to £350,000 for institutions scoring highly on the quality scale (i.e. 4*) (Watermeyer & Chubb, 2019). This was welcomed by some on the grounds that issues such as 'public engagement' were often seen as 'frivolous, faddish and tokenistic' (Watermeyer, 2012, p. 115) when excluded from high status accountability mechanisms but may now be viewed as a means of articulating and mobilizing impact. On this reading, moving beyond narrow bibliometric measures, and combining evaluations of the quality and impact of academics' work seems to recognise and legitimise the broader aspirations to contribute to positive change in society (Smith et al., 2013). This might be seen as particularly useful to academics working in the social sciences, where citations and bibliometric evaluation are seen as particularly problematic (Baccini et al., 2019).

Universities submit impact case studies that explain, through short narrative accounts, what impact has been achieved, and how this relates to the underlying research. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the trial of the first REF framework showed impact case studies tended to identify at least one of the 'P3 stakeholders': policymakers, practitioners or the public as the main focus of attention (Watermeyer, 2012, p. 121). Subsequent research has found a spread of types of

impact, for example across national, sectoral or institutional policy; through the provision of information or advice to specific stakeholder groups; influence on the research field; or impacts directly on practice (especially in health) (Wilkinson, 2019). In the UK, this may be seen as a natural extension of other aspects of funding policy, which has routinely required academics to outline 'pathways to impact' for their research, even at the stage where they are planning projects and bidding for funds (Watermeyer, 2012, p. 125).[2]

On the face of it then, these policy developments might be seen as a positive step towards aligning evaluation frameworks with academics' broader interests and motivations, and correcting some of the earlier narrow focuses on academic publications. However, several commentators have also expressed concerns that the extension of such a system actually represents a further encroachment on academic freedom and weakens the role of the academic researcher. Olssen (2016) positions his critique in the broader context of neoliberalism, the defining characteristic of which he takes to be 'an application of the logic and rules of market competition to the public sector' (p. 129). Drawing on Foucault he makes a clear contrast between classical liberalism, which had a negative conception of state power and therefore sought to free the individual from the state, and the new liberalism, which represents a positive conception of the state's role in creating the appropriate market. In the context of western welfare societies, neoliberalism requires new forms of surveillance, appraisal, and accountability to monitor and control individuals to ensure they conform to these market-emulating efforts of government (p. 130). Neoliberal reformers dismiss notions of the 'public good' as conceptually flawed (there is no single public, and therefore only individuals' needs and preferences) and therefore they see public sector workers' appeals to serve the public good as either misguided or deliberately self-serving (in universities this is seen to create a form of provider capture where the academics define the public good they choose to serve). Olssen argues that this means governance shifts to focus on the creation of new forms of incentivisation to ensure service providers meet the needs of the public (exercised directly through choice mechanisms rather than defined a priori), and consequent additional mechanisms for monitoring, accountability and management in the pursuit of efficiency (pp. 131-133).

The RAE / REF is one such mechanism which, Olssen argues, has a built-in narrowing effect, firstly, because those making quality judgements cannot possibly represent the breadth of academic diversity, and secondly, because impact studies impose new restrictions about what counts as valued academic activity – the 'relevance of research being undertaken in terms of the contribution and significance for the wider society' (p. 137). This creates a new set of incentives forcing academics into "hustling and hawking their wares to the media, and into fervent 'networking' to 'end-users' in society" (p. 137). On this view, 'the acquisition of new knowledge by receiver groups… increasingly resemble[s] a type of commercial transaction' (Watermeyer, 2014, p. 359 discussing Brown & Lauder, 1996). Knowledge generated in the university is viewed as a commodity which is ultimately sold to students and to other stakeholders, such as business or industry, and which may also be funded by government in a highly competitive knowledge economy. This leads to a shift in mind-set as universities position themselves as relevant players in a global market, with distinctive research profiles offering USPs, enabling them to engage in what Etkowitz (1998) called the 'capitalisation of knowledge' (discussed in Watermeyer, 2014, p. 360).

This analysis suggests that impact case studies will lead universities to confer greater esteem on certain forms of research and, by default, position other forms of research in a weaker comparative position. This encourages a form of 'post-academic research' based on instrumental research driven by market forces (Ziman, 2000 discussed in Olssen, 2016, p. 138). With this in mind Marques et al. (2017) have undertaken a statistical analysis of the impact of the REF / RAE processes on departments of education in universities. They identify the biggest intended outcome as the concentration of research funding in a small number of departments, alongside a shift towards quantitative and applied research. This provides evidence for Olssen's argument

that the 'evaluation' exercise is actually a mechanism for changing the type of educational research undertaken. In addition they identify two unintended effects as being the reduction in the number of 'active' researchers being entered and the rise of the research article as the main form of output. This lends some credibility to the fears that, rather than simply allowing academics to demonstrate their own impact, these neoliberal technologies have started to change the nature of academic research, narrowing the number of institutions engaged in publicly funded research, narrowing the methodologies employed, the types of research being undertaken, and the number of academics whose research really counts.

The pressures that have affected these changes across the higher education sector are also played out through the careers and work experiences of individual academics. At the beginning of their research projects, academics have to produce 'pathways to impact' plans in funding bids, and these are widely accepted as promoting exaggerations or untruths in the pursuit of some element that will distinguish their applications. This is evidence of performativity in action, as academics feel compelled to perform to external agendas with a degree of inauthenticity (Chubb & Watermeyer, 2017) as they respond to the (policy-led) priorities established by government, and start to second-guess what outcomes they might achieve in order to project desirable impacts (Doyle, 2018). If they are successful, they may subsequently write an impact case study, which also tends to privilege superficial elements, such as the ability to craft a compelling and well-written narrative, which seems to hold more weight in the evaluation process than the actual evidence base (Watermeyer & Hedgecoe, 2016; Watermeyer & Chubb, 2019). In this process, authors may be compelled to claim 'bragging rights' over a particular impact, which inevitably undermines collaborative partners (Watermeyer & Hedgecoe, 2016, p. 655), in order to create semi-fictional narratives which assert direct causation in circumstances where serendipity and unforeseen consequences play important parts (Watermeyer, 2012).

Once the technologies are in place, they are sustained by academics themselves, who are competing for the resources, prestige and opportunities afforded to those who demonstrate their success in playing by the new rules of the game. As Prior puts it:

> "The crucial insight of governmentality is that contemporary processes of governing operate through a myriad of mundane, everyday techniques and routines of discipline and control that are exercised by individual citizens and which enable them to function as self-regulating members of the polity." (Prior, 2009, p. 17)

Ironically, given the initial impetus to break old models of provider capture, this neoliberal system installs university academics as the engine to drive these changes. Being invited to join one of the panels assessing others' research is itself a marker of status and recognition, and thus those who succeed in the game become the arbiters of the rules, and become a self-reinforcing cadre, who both achieve scholarly distinction and confer it upon others through opaque moderation processes which effectively operate to establish 'scholarly distinction' as 'a matter of taste' (Watermeyer & Chubb, 2019).

2 Academics as subversive citizens

The arguments outlined above are compelling and the evidence about the impact of such policies should certainly provide pause for thought. However, these analyses do tend to position academics as relatively inert or powerless in these systems and so it is useful to balance this view with a more critical perspective which recognises how academics might also 'modify, disrupt or negate the intended processes and outcomes of public policy'" (Barnes & Prior, 2009, p. 3). This might resonate with those from the tradition of critical inquiry championed by Postman and Weingarten (1969) in their classic text on 'Teaching as a Subversive Activity.' In a similar spirit

Lipsky (1980) talked about 'street-level bureaucrats' who might overtly challenge policy or assert alternative practices (discussed in Barnes & Prior, 2009). However, the ensuing decades of neoliberal reforms have seriously re-cast issues of agency and opposition through two complementary processes. First, the market-emulating managerialist reforms to create target-led accountability systems deliberately reduce individuals' scope for autonomy; second, decentralised networks of governance and a proliferation of agencies and devolved organisations have also weakened the collective agency available to the workforce in previous generations. Nevertheless, whilst the scope for overt political opposition may be diminished, Barnes and Prior note the persistence of other forms of subversion, which in many ways remain distinctive features of public service workers' behaviour.

Whilst Olssen uses Foucault to think about the ways in which managerialist systems exert power over academics, it is also possible to use Foucault to recognise that 'where there is power, there is resistance' (Foucault, 1976, p. 95). Whilst on the one hand Foucault encourages us to attend to the discourses which shape our everyday practices and experiences, he also acknowledges that these same forces generate a plurality of resistances. In other words, we have to be alert both to the competing discourses which are constantly at play (and resist simplified accounts of institutions, actors and processes) and to the possibilities of disruption, compromise and opposition inherent in all power relations. As Prior puts it, 'while the practice of officials is made possible, directed and shaped by the range of available technologies and by the policy discourse… it is not wholly determined by them' (Prior, 2009, p. 21). Therefore individuals exercise 'situated judgements' about what action to take, informed by their knowledge of the public service and public policy; their knowledge of the local area and service-users; and their own professional identities and emotional responses. In some cases people will have the agency to decline to undertake certain roles or actions, but in others, they may act more positively to generate alternative strategies and outcomes, or exploit gaps in policy (p. 27). Prior argues such counter-agency exists in at least three forms:

> - Revision, for example the reappraisal of what actions are required to secure outcomes the worker deems appropriate.
> Resistance, "not by overt acts of disruption or rebellion but by seeming to accept the subject roles constructed for them… while privately rejecting them and developing covert personal strategies" (p. 31).
> - Refusal, sometimes more overt, but sometimes a quieter process of letting things slip.

For Barnes and Prior, these are widespread features of how employees function across the public sector.

In the context of education, Stickney (2012) has suggested that teachers under increasingly intense surveillance might re-present their practices in terms more amenable to managerialist assumptions, or may even draw a deliberate distinction between the 'public scripts' they employ with those in power and the 'hidden scripts' they reserve for their practice. Ball and Olmedo (2013) argue that a teacher's sense of identity cannot exist prior to their engagement in such power relations and that such identities are formed through what teachers do, rather than what they are in some essential sense. In the context of academic researchers in universities, this implies that our identity is shaped by the professional practices we develop, in the full knowledge of the prevailing norms and expectations. This means being alert to the sector-wide policy frameworks (and their effects) that have been described so far, but also being alert to the variety of contexts in which such academic work takes place.

Academics negotiate their agency within specific contexts and these are differentiated by institution, by department / research centre, and by specific field(s) of expertise. In this it is useful to draw on Lave and Wenger's (1991) account of how one joins a community of practice.

Wenger's later work situates this sense of membership within a wider community through the concept of 'landscapes of learning' (Wenger-Trayner et al., 2014). This extends his earlier work to recognise that in any professional field, there are different communities of practice, sometimes overlapping or nested, but sometimes separate. For example, a researcher with expertise in school-based social science education may work differently in a university research centre focused on developing randomised control trials, compared to a similar researcher in a department focused on developing local action research projects with partnership schools. Becoming a member of a profession implies developing the competence to be a professional in a specific context, but also a sense of oneself in the broader professional landscape. For readers of this journal, this might depend on situating oneself in the field of social science education (Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019) and in the field of research methodology, and in the university sector. The extent to which any single social science education researcher feels the need to subvert or comply with policy will be influenced by how they perceive their position in these three fields.

Many members of staff in university departments of education have moved into university following careers in teaching. In terms of their approach to research, one might expect these academics to bring different identities, expectations, and concerns to their research activity compared to peers who have arrived in similar roles through training solely as a professional researcher. The distinction between them might in part depend on the communities of practice to which they belong, the relationships between those communities (and identities), and the opportunities afforded to different types of activity within the employing institution. All of these issues are relevant when an academic comes to make 'situated judgements' about where to focus their research efforts. By way of illustration, O'Connell's (2019) research into impact identified more researchers in post-1992 universities who claimed to achieve impact through forms of 'policy activism' whereas researchers in pre-1992 universities tended to claim impact through a more 'arm's length' form of influence.[3] This is not surprising if one considers that the newer universities are less likely to have high status research funding, and more likely to be involved in practical training and professional development activities. A similar division can be observed within universities, where departments of education often employ people who have taught in schools, and for whom teaching remains their main priority. This leads to distinctive higher education careers and identities, and often leads such staff members to perceive research as an adjunct to their teaching practice (Swennen et al., 2017).

This section has argued that there are (constrained) opportunities for social science education researchers in higher education to challenge, reinterpret and constructively engage with neoliberal policies in order to pursue alternative agendas. Drawing on conceptualisations of public service work in general, and teaching specifically, as inherently subversive, it is possible to imagine a wider range of responses than Olssen seemed to imagine (above). The next section turns to consider how, in practical terms, the policy model of impact is flawed, and therefore requires academics to actively interpret and enact the policy in different ways. It then considers some of the ways in which the idea of impact has been expanded to encompass a broad range of definitions and activities that might be more useful to social science education researchers, especially those working alongside practitioners and aligning their research with practice.

3 Returning to impact

Within the official guidance on plotting prospective pathways to impact and constructing retrospective narrative case studies of impact, there is a default assumption of a linear logic model, which has been widely criticised for being unrealistic (Doyle, 2019). In the relatively rare instances where a researcher publishes outcomes which are swiftly adopted by policymakers, this may be seen as the result of the ideological bias of policymakers, rather than the direct influence

of the researcher (Gardner et al., 2008; Lingard, 2013). Even where clear ideological bias is not at work, such direct translation of research into policy is as likely to result from a 'random concatenation of circumstances' or the agency of another policy broker as it is to derive from a well-designed impact strategy (Noyes & Adkins, 2016, p. 461). It is also likely that any research findings which do inform policy are likely to go through several processes of adaptation, which involve various forms of distortion. Typically, this involves interpreters taking the findings out of the historical and cultural context in which the research was conducted; using only parts of the findings; over-generalising the findings; or misinterpreting them, for example mistaking correlation for causation (Noyes & Adkins, 2016, p. 459-60).

For education researchers the problem of linear impact is also complicated by the difficulty in securing direct impacts on teachers or students. Various reasons have been suggested for this, including the fact that, in many countries, teachers do not routinely engage with educational research. In England, for example, the regulations for becoming a qualified teacher make no mention of using research and, as a consequence, teachers receive no recognition or status for doing so. In addition, teachers receive little training on how to conduct or interpret research, and generally have restricted access to research findings, which are often behind expensive paywalls (Cain & Allan, 2017). When teachers do access research findings, they have generally been written in a rather esoteric style for peer-reviewed academic journals, and therefore do not read across readily into practice (Watermeyer, 2014). These problems of access and relevance mean that the connections between researchers and teachers are often mediated through a series of complex networks. Bates (2002) described these 'connecting webs' as 'real networks forming around real issues' (p. 405), which are made up of a host of 'bridgers and brokers' (Ball & Exley, 2010 in Noyes & Adkins, 2016). Bates also argued that researchers are generally only loosely connected to such networks at one end, and teachers are equally loosely connected at the other end, making the links between research outcomes and classroom change highly tenuous. In practice this has led many of the education academics submitting case studies to the education REF to claim impact is secured though incorporating conclusions from research into textbooks or other classroom resources (Cain & Allen, 2017). Whilst this may well circumvent some of the problems outlined above, it also serves to make the research itself invisible to the practitioners who are generating the impact, i.e. a teacher may implement a recommendation from research, but only because it has been embedded in a textbook. This means the teacher has not engaged with the research, and it may also mean they have not thought consciously about how their teaching incorporates the insight from research. This in turn opens up the distinct possibility that the researcher / author's intentions are distorted as the teacher interprets and enacts the material in their own context (Elwick & Jerome, 2019).

Aside from these problems of direct impact, success for an educational researcher might be better defined as influencing thinking or practice (Cain & Allen, 2017, p. 724), and Lingard (2013) has argued that whilst 'research for policy' might secure short term measurable impacts, most of what he calls 'academic research' will actually generate impact over the longer term by contributing to the 'assumptive worlds' of policymakers and practitioners. This has led some to argue for 'soft indicators' of impact, to capture these 'enlightenment effects' (Gardner et al., 2008). Gardner and his colleagues have argued that this should include 'any form of subjective, anecdotal or impressionistic data that allows potential impact to be identified through reasonable interpretation of their strength and variety' (p. 98) working on the assumption that where there is smoke, one may reasonably assume there is fire.

These authors have highlighted some of the problems associated with accounting for impact and the picture is further complicated by considering the practitioner-researcher working alongside multiple partners to secure impact outside of academia. The rest of this section considers several attempts to engage with these complicating factors. Miettenen et al. (2015) have argued that researchers should account for their impact through three dimensions:

> 1) Epistemological impact: where researchers make a contribution to better understand the phenomenon being researched.
> 2) Artefactual impact: where the research process generates artefacts, instruments or services through which impact can be realized.
> 3) Institutional-interactional impact: where forms of interactions between the researcher and other stakeholders or social groups have a lasting impact.

Whilst this goes some way to opening up the debate about types of impact from educational research, it still leaves open the question of how one might capture the impact, given that the publication of a practitioner handbook (an artefact) is very different from securing practitioner changed behaviour (the impact).

Banks and her colleagues explore participatory action research as one form of research which generates multiple forms of impact. They also develop a three part model to describe the impacts of their work (Banks et al., 2017):

> 1) Participatory impact: where there is an impact on the people directly involved in the process.
> 2) Collaborative impact: where impacts result from changes in organisations and practices as a result of the substantive findings of the research.
> 3) Collective impact: where organisations continue to work together to undertake campaigning activities to secure further impact, in the light of the research.

This model starts to describe the ways in which a teacher-researcher might account for the impact of their work, and indeed this may be their primary goal – to help the participants and institutions where they are working.

Whilst these first two models offer typologies for impact, Woolcott et al. (2019) adopt human cultural accumulation theory to explain the various forms impact might take. For them:

> "Overall impact emanates from cultural change in a context of the cultural learning of members of a research collaboration. A component of the impact of that research collaboration, due to cultural change, may contribute to societal cultural accumulation as residual or 'left over' in the system." (Woolcott et al., 2019, p. 3)

They use the term 'residual cultural accumulation' to describe what is 'left over' after a collaborative research project has ended. These 'left overs' might include something as concealed as personal memories, something as concrete as a handbook, or something as open to interpretation as an established way of working. On this view, influencing network members to adopt new or altered positions might already count as a significant impact in a collaborative project.

These last three contributions to the literature hint at some of the ways forward for accounting for impact in educational research, but they also seem slightly restricted in that they tend to default to a single role for the educational researcher, albeit recognising that they exist within more complex collaborative networks. In the following section I will consider a case study which seeks to draw on these ideas but also acknowledge that educational researchers in universities may also inhabit additional roles within those networks, which adds yet another potential layer of complexity to the task of understanding impact.

4 Impact case study: engaging with Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) policy

This section considers the author's attempts to piece together an impact case study for the REF2021 submission. The intention is to reflect on the construction of the impact case study as

an illuminative example of how a social science educational researcher might conceptualise 'impact'. Using the REF guidance sheds light on certain aspects on the work, but the broader literature about impact highlights other aspects of practice that may not sit so easily within these formal evaluation processes.

4.1 Context

From 2006 the UK government has developed policies for schools aiming to eradicate the threat of violent extremism and terrorism, known as the Prevent strategy. This has two dimensions, first a broad duty to promote community cohesion and second a more focused route for reporting individuals suspected of being at risk of extremism (the Channel process). In 2014 the broad aim of community cohesion was enhanced with a more specific responsibility to promote the 'fundamental British values' (FBVs), and in 2015 The UK Counter-Terrorism and Security Act introduced a new legal duty for teachers to 'have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (Jerome et al., 2019). At the same time citizenship education, which had been promoted by the previous government, has been weakened through ministerial criticism and policy neglect. Fewer teachers are qualifying as subject specialists each year, fewer teachers are employed to teach Citizenship, and exam reforms have led to a significant decline in the number of young people gaining qualifications in Citizenship Studies. For social science educators, this means there has been a rise to prominence of a policy calling for teachers to 'promote' democracy, the rule of law and religious tolerance; whilst there has been a decline in critical education about these concepts (Vincent, 2019). Some educationalists have expressed concern that there is a lack of clarity between the educational and security focus of such work (Panjwani, 2016).

I have been working with colleagues in this contentious territory since 2015, both to try to clarify what an 'educational' response might look like and to seek to influence the shaping and enactment of policy in this area. In terms of impact, one can already perceive a certain vagueness here, in that I and colleagues were aware of the potential dangers of an excessively security-led response, but working towards clarity of the educational alternatives, and seeking opportunities to learn from and with school-based practitioners. We did not start with a 'pathway to impact' already defined, rather we started with a set of concerns and questions and committed to a process of collaboration to develop and trial approaches that might help, and then to disseminate the lessons learned to support colleagues and policymakers.

Whilst it would have been impossible to outline this in advance, in retrospect it is possible to present this work in three phases:

> 1) Initial scoping to inform an educational response
> In collaboration with colleagues at the Association for Citizenship Teaching (ACT) and the Expert Subject Advisory Group (ESAG) for Citizenship I helped to conduct a literature review on controversial issues pedagogy and to write guidance for teachers and school leaders (ACT/ESAG, 2016).[4]
>
> 2) The Building Resilience project
> www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/act-building-resilience-project
> ACT secured a Home Office contract to run a curriculum development project 'Building Resilience', during the spring and summer terms 2016. This project included ten schools, each developing a locally responsive curriculum project based on the principles in the ACT/ESAG (2016) guidance. A colleague and I undertook the evaluation of this project (Jerome & Elwick, 2016), which led to a number of academic outputs (Jerome & Elwick, 2019 a & b; Elwick & Jerome, 2019).

3) The Deliberative Classroom project
www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/deliberative-classroom-topical-debating-resources-and-teacher-guidance

4) Emerging evidence (Jerome et al., 2019) indicated there was a risk that the Prevent policy could turn into a narrow project related to restricted forms of British identity; but that young people felt they needed schools to tackle this area explicitly and consistently to build their knowledge and critical understanding. ACT, the English Speaking Union (ESU), and I responded to these issues in a second project called 'The Deliberative Classroom', which was funded by the DfE. A companion research project (for which I was the Principal Investigator) was also funded by the British Academy, to explore how well teachers can embed deliberation about the FBVs in their classrooms (Jerome, 2020).

4.2 Networks, actors and interactions

The literature discussed on impact, above, acknowledges that the researcher may be working in partnerships and collaborative networks (see Mietennen et al., 2015; Banks et al., 2017; Woolcott et al., 2019). But in this example, phase 1 started with a series of collaborative discussions in which ideas were floated, discussed, discarded or developed as a group. Whilst I acted as lead author and reviewer, many colleagues made contributions, and the document was published as an ACT / ESAG collaboration, not in my name. I might seek to justify my 'bragging rights' in this context (Watermeyer & Hedgecoe, 2016), but it would be difficult to disentangle the process through which these ideas emerged and were refined. This represents a modest example of what Apple refers to as broadening what counts as research to act as 'critical secretaries' to groups engaged in political struggles (Apple, 2013, p. 41). Social science education colleagues will recognise that there is often a political struggle around securing adequate resources, time and status in the curriculum.

Similarly, in the 'Building Resilience' project the bid was won by ACT, and they awarded my university the contract to evaluate and document the project. The ideas developed in the project were informed by a steering group, to which I contributed, by the teachers and their colleagues, by staff at ACT and by two advisory teachers who were employed by ACT to support the teachers. Whilst the publications I subsequently wrote with my colleague distil some useful insights from this project, it is difficult to claim these are 'our' contributions, given that they largely derive from our reflections on experienced teachers' practice. To further complicate matters, some of these outcomes included practitioner conferences, where the work was presented, sometimes in collaboration with the participating teachers, and some of these were subsequently published – in the name of the teachers, but ghost-written by me based on their conference presentations. In our working relationship such a facilitating role makes sense, because I have time and experience writing for publication, whilst colleagues in school do not.

Finally, in 'The Deliberative Classroom' project, new partners with whom I worked directly included civil servants in the DfE, the English Speaking Union, and several academics who had expertise in the substantive topics we were covering in the educational resources. I was much more actively involved in writing this bid with ACT and the ESU as a collaborative endeavour, with defined roles (and funds) for each partner; although the British Academy research project was awarded just to the university. In this case the DfE was much more hands-on than the Home Office had been and the published teaching materials have also been shaped by the civil servants' active editorial interventions. To complicate matters further the DfE grew increasingly wary of our approach during the project and exercised their right to vary the contract, withdrawing funds from resource development and re-directing them to the production of training videos for schools. There are outcomes here that were not even planned by the project team, but rather

thrashed out as a compromise with vacillating civil servants – what does this suggest about impact, or ownership of such impact?

The REF (2019) guidance stipulates that each impact case study should clearly delineate the contribution made by each university based contributor, and that each impact should be clearly based on high quality research. But these messy interactions, and shared experiences of co-production are clearly generative, and yet difficult to account for. The requirement to construct narratives according to the REF template transforms the narrative from a group endeavour to a collection of individual contributions. In the re-telling of the story, a degree of fictionalisation is required because the collective process cannot feature as an actor or originator of ideas. As the only university researcher in this group constructing an impact case study, it seems that it falls to me not just to assert bragging rights, but to claim Woolcott's (2019) cultural 'left overs' as my own.

4.3 Multiple roles

The literature cited in this paper about 'impact' positions the academic researcher relatively unproblematically in the single role of a university-based researcher, with occasional acknowledgement that they may also act as an educational resource writer to communicate their research findings in a useful format. This is reflected in the REF (2019) guidance which, even when acknowledging academics may have other roles such as advisors, insists that to count as impact the researcher must demonstrate that they were consulted because of their excellent research, and that their advice drew on that excellent research. In reflecting on the impact case study, it has become more apparent that, in reality, as a social science education researcher (perhaps more accurately educator-researcher) I have sought to secure some kind of influence or impact through a variety of diverse roles:

- University researcher: I have secured external 'respectable' funding as Principal Investigator, and published peer-reviewed articles and presented at academic conferences. In part the impact I am aiming for here is to build knowledge about educational approaches to Prevent, and inform the 'assumptive world' of policymakers (Lingard, 2013).
- Member of ACT: I am also a paid up member of ACT, and thus have contributed to conversations with peers, helped to develop policy positions, and been influenced in turn by others in this national network.
- Other professional networks: through helping to plan and contributing to conferences and seminars around this theme I have attempted to broaden my impact by facilitating conversations about anti-extremism in education.
- Editor: as part of my voluntary work with ACT I edit their practitioner journal. Here my impact is sometimes directly to communicate my work to practitioners, but more generally to facilitate conversations about Prevent and citizenship education.
- Educational resource writer: I have written materials which I am subsequently researching. Here I am attempting to create an impact through the use of educational resources, and to evaluate the impact, and then to publish the findings to secure further impact.
- Lobbying and activism: I have also supported teacher-led organisations, participated in consultation events, and facilitated workshops for teachers' unions. In these activities I am more openly concerned with articulating a political opinion about Prevent and ensuring my voice is part of broader professional conversations.
- Lecturer – as a teacher I contribute to modules on policy development, equalities, and professional training courses for teachers. In this role I am raising awareness,

prompting students to understand this as a contentious area, and hopefully sharing some insights into the intended and unintended consequences of policy.

4.4 The question of impact

In the REF impact case study the story I have chosen to carve out of these experiences is that my research has helped to establish a discourse around an educational response to Prevent rather than a security response. In essence the evidence for this is that the work outlined above helped to define and test such an approach, and that this received a measure of official approval through the allocation of government funding to support the work. Secondly, the evaluation and research projects demonstrate some of the successful impacts for young people who experienced these projects.

However, the literature cited above indicates this is a very partial story. This example of an impact case study highlights that as an educationalist, research is just one activity I undertake, and researcher is just one role I inhabit. My professional identity is actually not as researcher it is primarily citizenship educator. The networks, organisations and campaigns in which I participate are not extensions of research activity, and are certainly not 'frivolous' or 'tokenistic' (Watermeyer, 2012). Rather my main interest is in promoting citizenship education in schools and in the education system more generally and in helping to develop practice in the field. Sometimes I do that by researching aspects of practice and sharing the results, for example through publishing reports or teaching material, devising funding proposals for further development projects, or running classes or training workshops. Sometimes I do that by seeking a direct influence on practice, but at other times I seek to influence others, hoping to use their access and lobbying skills to promote shared interests. And, sometimes I do it by diversifying the types of voices in the debate by investing time and effort in facilitating colleagues' participation. In this list of roles and activities I recognise many friends and colleagues working in education, and certainly most of those whose work I follow in social science education research.

Whilst the REF process will collect some stories to reflect the impact of university-based research, it will not capture anything like the whole picture of the impact of education research. The bits of the story that are left out of formal accounts may well indicate some of the wider dimensions of impact that might prove valuable elements of the social science education researcher's 'real world' impact (Doyle, 2018). These additional, officially invisible, impacts might include:

1) Impact on the self: In the account provided above, the three phases of research emerged from experience, with the end of phase 1 opening up the possibility of phase 2 and so on. If researchers are genuinely engaged in knotty problems of practice or policy, then it stands to reason that one of the useful impacts is on their own understanding of the terrain, and their own ability to formulate future research and practice agendas.

2) Impact on networks: On occasion a researcher might seek direct influence on practice or policy. It would seem that success in this endeavour is as likely to result from the researcher's skills as an advocate or lobbyist rather than as a researcher. It may well be more appropriate therefore to think of impact within those networks described by Bates (2002) as forming around 'real issues'. Rather than acquiesce to being only loosely connected to such networks, it may well make good sense to invest time and effort to become more embedded in them, and to see one's impact as a contribution to the collective endeavour to secure change.

3) Impact on professional discourse: Social science education researchers, especially when the prevailing policy context is not particularly positive, can make an important contribution by starting conversations, sustaining them, stirring up questions where they may not have emerged, and encouraging others to share their views. It seems to me this form of impact is almost impossible to capture in any compelling outcome statement, but I am convinced that sustaining professional conversations is an absolutely crucial aspect of a healthy social science education community. Lukes (2005) observed that the most significant form of power is the power to keep issues off the agenda, so that they are not even considered – literally left unnoticed and unexplored, and thus the status quo is left untroubled. For me, my work on the Prevent policy is ultimately about making a contribution to sustaining conversations in which citizenship educators continue to think through the implications for policy and their practice. Woolcott (2019) comes close to this in his recognition that impact may reside in intangible cultural left-overs. More powerfully, this resonates with scholarship on the impacts of the feminist movement, which concluded that the sheer persistence of a movement creates 'cultural memories' that show how things can be 'different and better' (Jolly, 2012). Whilst one's immediate goals may not be met, the collective effort to sustain a movement, albeit in the case of citizenship education a relatively small one, can be sustaining and transformational for individuals, can be generative of new practices, and can keep ideas developing that may eventually influence policy (Halsaa et al., 2012). As one member of a community of practitioners, this seems to me a crucial role to play, but one in which every individual's contribution is soon assimilated in the collective enterprise.

5 Conclusions: 'Surfing the neoliberal policy wave'

In discussing how to respond to REF requirements whilst continuing to do work she believes in, one of O'Connell's interviewees suggested, 'you can surf the neo liberal policy wave, but you can kind of have fun while you're doing it' (O'Connell, 2019, p. 1448). It is not particularly surprising that a technology emerging from a neoliberal paradigm struggles to find a language for accounting for an academic's general contribution to sustaining a community of practice, or even more specifically a conversation within that community, but that is no reason for not recognising the significance of these impacts. In part this is because, like all neoliberal policy technologies, the REF narrows the surveilling gaze to those issues managers and policymakers want to count as legitimate, or most valued. Olssen (2016) seems to assume that work outside of that policy gaze will wither, and to some extent he may be correct. But an alternative way to view this is that processes officially viewed as marginal may continue in the shadows, away from the policy spotlight. Perhaps in the neoliberal context, avoiding scrutiny leaves some shadowy areas for subversion to flourish. This reflects Prior's (2009) description of 'resistance' as a form of calculated compliance to win the resources and time to pursue wider strategies for engagement in professional communities.

In constructing a REF impact case study academics are presenting one among many possible versions of events, and that is bound to be partial and, if it is to succeed, it should be tailored to the audience and purpose. This approach might reflect the distinction Stickney (2012) makes between 'public' and 'hidden' scripts, but that does not make it any less authentic than when academics re-write a research article as a short blog for a teacher website, or as a training workshop for some colleagues. Along the way some details are lost, other information is added, and ideas are translated into different forms, to meet different purposes and to appeal to different audiences. It may also be useful to conceptualise such work as a form of 'critical bureaucracy' (Carlile, 2012) in which we pursue the same commitments that motivate critical

pedagogy, but through the administrative processes (such as REF) that sit apart from teaching. The story social science education researchers tell about their research impacts should not be seen as the entire and authentic account of who they are or what they do. If that partial story can be drawn from a more holistic sense of the academic as a member of a profession, striving for various impacts (and being impacted in turn by various influences) within communities of practice, then they may well achieve the precarious balance associated with riding a powerful wave. Perhaps by striving to gain recognition on the terms established by the REF, such researchers may continue to inhabit these other, officially invisible roles, in order to contribute what they can to sustain social science education.

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ENDNOTES:

[1] The REF provides a public mechanism for (i) comparison across universities and (ii) the disbursement of funds. There are 34 Units of Assessment (UoA), representing clusters of disciplinary / subject expertise. University staff members are organised into UoA groups and select samples of research outputs to be submitted for review to the national UoA panels. This sample of work is reviewed by members of the national panels and awarded a grade from 1* to 4* (with 4* signifying 'world leading' quality). Alongside these measures of the research outputs, UoAs and universities are assessed on their research impact and on the quality of their research environment (www.ref.ac.uk). The results of the 2014 REF are published here: www.ref.ac.uk/2014/

[2] The UK Research and Innovation website makes it clear that "a clearly thought through and acceptable Pathways to Impact is an essential component of a research proposal and a condition of funding. Grants will not be allowed to start until a clearly thought through and acceptable Pathways to Impact statement is received." (www.ukri.org/innovation/excellence-with-impact/pathways-to-impact/)

[3] Before 1992 the UK higher education system was divided between universities and polytechnics, with the latter being more focused on vocational, technical and applied tertiary education. In 1992 this distinction was dissolved as they all became universities, but the old polytechnics (now new universities) continue to be seen as somewhat distinct from the old more established universities. Post-92 universities are often seen as being more oriented to professional and vocational education, and more likely to take a wider range of students.

[4] ACT is the only national subject association for Citizenship in the UK, it is primarily led by its members who are largely teachers. The ESAG was initially established by the Department for Education to provide advice and guidance on a curriculum review.