Mythologies of neoliberalism: An analysis of Widening Participation to Higher Education

Submitted by Louise Hazel Jackson to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education, April 2015

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(Signature)

............................................................................................................................................................................
DECLARATION

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Notions of Widening Participation to Higher Education are characterised by perceptions of an inherent "goodness" for (Western) democracy. This is based around a premise that predicates social justice upon access to education to ensure sufficient preparation for successful participation in the Knowledge Economy. This correlation between social justice, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy can be identified as part of the neoliberal ideology that has underpinned political, economic and subsequent educational policies and practices with a rigorous promotion of the Free Market. This thesis examines Widening Participation as a mechanism through which neoliberal ideology has enabled the development of a market model of Higher Education. To understand this, a range of conceptual apparatus is utilised to reframe the common perceptions of what Widening Participation is and what purpose it has, by establishing Widening Participation as a critical part of the discourse relating to the commodification of Higher Education. The proposition of neoliberal Widening Participation is examined through the lens of Commodity Fetishisation (Marx), Educational Fundamentalism (Alvesson) and Stultification (Rancière). Together, these theories form a framework to understand the narratives surrounding the conceptualisation of Widening Participation within neoliberal ideology. These narratives are argued here to have cultivated expectations for a consumerist student population through the transformation of the perceived benefits of a traditional Higher Education into reified concepts of pedagogical practice. As such, Widening Participation is positioned here as a way in which the saturation of Higher Education was justified as social justice. This Widening Participation positions learners and teachers within a Higher Education that is part of a Debt Economy expressed as a Knowledge Economy. The result is a role for neoliberal Widening Participation in propagating pedagogical myths that Rancière describes as suppressing Intellectual Emancipation even when appearing to be facilitating it.
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### ABBREVIATIONS

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<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>Black and Minority Ethnic</td>
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<tr>
<td>DLHE</td>
<td>Destination of Leavers from Higher Education</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>HEA</td>
<td>Higher Education Academy</td>
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<td>Higher Education Funding Council of England</td>
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<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<td>Higher Education Statistics Agency</td>
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<td>NSS</td>
<td>National Student Survey</td>
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<td>OFFA</td>
<td>Office of Fair Access</td>
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<td>OIA</td>
<td>Office of the Independent Adjudicator</td>
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<td>QAA</td>
<td>Quality Assurance Agency</td>
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<td>WP</td>
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1. Introduction

This thesis belongs to an emerging discourse that repositions Widening Participation as a political site of contestation and critique. There is a commonality between this thesis and the work of Burke (2012) in the assertion of the need to rethink Widening Participation as a political site in itself rather than a resulting action of political and educational endeavour. In particular it is the hegemonic beliefs about the conceptualisation and construction of Widening Participation that need to be challenged. Burke’s poststructuralist criticality concludes with a promotion of ‘participatory pedagogies’ (2012, p. 185) that follow from the work of Friere. Here, however, it is argued that examining different critiques of neoliberalism reveal a complex set of social relationships that impact on conceptual understandings of what Widening Participation is and what purpose it serves. To engage with this, a range of conceptual lenses are employed to problematise the normative assumptions associated with Widening Participation and its relationship to Higher Education and the neoliberal context.

Widening Participation to Higher Education is a concept that was first articulated in research literature around 1992 (Alan, 1992) and is associated with the more established notion of access to education relating to inequalities and exclusions in participation (Gorard et al, 2007, p. 2). The Widening Participation form of access to Higher Education discussed here has developed over the past twenty years as an infrastructural imperative within Higher Education. Widening Participation is defined by Jones (2008) as ‘a term associated with addressing patterns of under-representation in higher education’. It is used to articulate an approach or conceptual understanding of how a Higher Education institution (HEI) or the broader Higher Education sector supports those from backgrounds that have a lower rate of progression into Higher Education as part of a national agenda in the UK. The classification of underrepresented backgrounds is problematised by Gorard et al, (2007) but described to include particular ‘social groups defined by social class or ethnic background… unfairly represented in higher education’ (p. 19). Gorard identifies the following classifications as
important in understanding underrepresentation: social class, age, ethnic
groups, gender, disability and area of residence (pp. 21-32). Widening
Participation mechanisms have promoted the inclusion of a wider range of
participants from more diverse and non-traditional backgrounds such as first
generation entrants, ethnic minorities or mature students. To meet the needs of
this growing diversity within the student population, learning and teaching within
Higher Education has likewise had to adapt strategic approaches in order to
understand and address the variety of learner perspectives and interests.

Widening Participation did not originate conceptually within the “New” Labour
term of office (1997 - 2010). It was however, promoted under the Education
mantra of the party during this period (TLRP, 2008, p. 4). Research and
resources to promote Widening Participation activities were developed
increasingly through this time and many different initiatives were funded. *Aim
Higher* was a particular programme of funding and activity that existed between
2003-2011 and focused specifically on raising ‘aspirations and motivation to
enter HE among learners from under-represented groups’ (HEFCE, 2012a) and
was a major signal of the “New” Labour government’s interest in Widening
Participation. £252,850,000 was invested during its lifespan (Ibid) and could be
seen to reflect the commitment of “New” Labour in ensuring that Higher
Education was a viable pathway for many individuals regardless of their
backgrounds.

When the Conservative-Liberal Democrats Coalition government came to
power in 2010, the global context was one of economic crisis. The resultant
changes included the removal of significant funding streams from Widening
Participation activities including *Aim Higher* (HEFCE, 2010). Even though
funding was removed the expectation remained for HEIs to continue the
Widening Participation project. This is evidenced in the continuation and
increasing emphasis placed on Access Agreements that had been introduced in
2006. These agreements outline how an institution would promote participation
to underrepresented groups (OFFA, 2015). Instead of a centrally funded
approach to funding programmes of activity delivered at institutional, local,
regional and national levels, institutions had to absorb the cost themselves
whilst meeting milestones and performance indicators of success in diversifying
and widening the demographic of those who could access Higher Education. This would result in a developing regulatory framework and a reinforcement of the role Widening Participation to Higher Education performs within an increasingly marketised form of social justice.

According to HEFCE (2015), Widening Participation is a fundamental mechanism for the role Higher Education can play within the notion of social justice. If social justice is the ‘fairness and equality of opportunity’ (Pattison, 2008, p. 107) the relationship between Higher Education and social justice through a Widening of Participation may seem an unproblematic concept. Yet, this relationship invokes a wide range of complex and intersecting issues when explored through different critical lenses. This debate regarding the ‘ethics’ of Widening Participation is a small but present aspect of the field of Widening Participation. The question posed within this sub field, i.e. whether the intervention process and practice should exist, also developed alongside the increase in student fees and the burden of debt students are now encouraged to take on (Swain, 2011). It is within this aspect of the field that the work presented here is situated and in particular, the way in which this functions within a neoliberal ideological context.

The removal of a centrally funded approach to Widening Participation signalled a shift to a neoliberal, or market-based model of capitalism. This position of Widening Participation would mirror the apparent market-model approach to Higher Education identified by many critics including Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon (2011). In addition to this neoliberal political landscape connecting the policies of a 1980s Thatcher-Conservative government with their revival in 2010 by the Coalition government, Hill (2007) had previously suggested neoliberal market-model practices had encapsulated both sides of the House of Commons for many years before. With this framework, the research presented here examines how a commodified, market based Higher Education sector had been facilitated through the Widening Participation agenda of the past twenty years.

Indeed, the rationale and conceptual basis for Widening Participation is opened up to critique here as a neoliberal mechanism. This critique uses a constructed conceptual framework to explore and understand different ways in which to examine Widening Participation. The framework uses lenses of Commodity
Fetishism (Marx), Educational Fundamentalism (Alvesson) and Stultification (Rancière) to provide a way of invoking a Foucauldian approach to understanding the ideology of Widening Participation. Instead of seeking an articulation of binary positions, this research establishes complex and multidirectional relationships between Widening Participation, Higher Education and a neoliberal political landscape. This research deliberately takes a step back from developing Widening Participation activity and proposing developments of policy and practice. Instead, it seeks to understand the political context of the past twenty years and the supporting conceptualisation that underpins these changes. The focus on how political and ideological context and conceptualisation both influences and is influenced by Widening Participation is a gap that this work seeks to address.

One aspect of this discussion involves understanding how the values of Widening Participation have become naturalised within political argument and in particular as part of a neoliberal context. This naturalisation suggests how the values of Widening Participation hold some form of influencing currency within political discussion and political decision-making. One example includes George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer, claiming there would be no more ‘cap on aspirations’ in the Autumn Budget of 2013. This budget detailed the removal of the cap on student numbers and was a way of articulating a previous restriction established by the state being a barrier to individual progression (Osborne, 2013).

Widening Participation is suggested here to have functioned as part of a developing Higher Education predicated on market models of satisfaction and indicators of success. Therefore, the research presented here seeks to understand how Widening Participation fits within this neoliberal context and what purpose it serves within this particular ideological position.

1.1 Purpose of the Introduction

This first chapter serves to set the scene for the rest of the study. Broadly, the chapter begins to outline the positionality of the researcher; what Widening Participation to Higher Education is; how it relates to contemporary ideas relating to constructions of Higher Education; and how neoliberal political
ideologies influenced Higher Education through Widening Participation.

The broad aims of this research are:

• To position Widening Participation contemporary discourse in relation to the commodification of Higher Education;

• To challenge the conceptualisation of Widening Participation as a form of social justice and to suggest ways in which it has been appropriated through neoliberal Ideology models of development;

• To analyse Widening Participation in order to destabilise and deconstruct the traditional narratives of Widening Participation as social justice and the associated implications for social mobility.

These aims will be revised as research questions at the end of the Literature Review in Chapter Two in order to position them within the field of study. Their placement within this introduction merely serves as an initial signposting for the reader. The structure of the rest of this chapter serves to position the researcher in relation to the subject matter and then to establish the different fields that intersect: Widening Participation; Higher Education; and neoliberalism.

1.2 Background of the Researcher

This thesis invokes a highly personal connection between the author and subject matter under investigation. I was a first generation university graduate and although subject to a Higher Education policy that introduced tuition fees, I was not required to pay fees as my family income was under the threshold for contributions. Instead, I received a loan and later a maintenance grant for those with dependents. I obtained through the clearing process a place on a Music BA (Hons) Degree at a local University College, (a former Institute of Higher Education) having not been successful as an A-Level student. I had developed, however, skills in playing the piano and singing. Access to the resources required for this skill acquisition such as obtaining a piano and receiving private lessons necessitated my family to make financial sacrifices. It was the combination of a demanding piano teacher and a highly invested English teacher at a local comprehensive school that gave me some experience of the importance of “someone” taking an interest in me and helping me make choices
about life and education. Importantly, it embedded an awareness of the choices and pathways that were open to me that I would not have had knowledge of otherwise. Those two influential teachers also promoted a critical questioning view of the world that would affect how I later engaged with music as an undergraduate student. As Wellington et al, (2005) suggests this perspective creates positionality within the EdD programme and the way in which I have engaged with my research. This positionality includes that of an 'insider' (Schostak, 2002): I can position myself as an insider as I relate to the themes and issues relating to Widening Participation.

Once I was at University, my aim was always to go as far as I possibly could in academia. I studied for a theoretical Masters in Music at a research-intensive university and this move was important for how I perceived my development in moving from a local site of Higher Education to an international centre of research. This study was self-funded with family support and employment as a peripatetic teacher three days a week. I returned to my Alma Mater when offered some part-time undergraduate teaching as I ended my Master's programme. The first group of students I worked with included musicians that did not have the theoretical knowledge to prepare them for degree level study. Most of these students were from non-traditional backgrounds and in particular were first generation entrants to Higher Education. My role was to provide extra-curricular workshops that would help them in the transition to Higher Education as well as teaching on a basic music theory module. I was then appointed as a Senior Lecturer in Music and Musical Theatre. I had significant responsibility for Level Four activity and developed modules that catered for the need to develop skills, knowledge and understanding to prepare them for the rest of their degree programme. What I was doing, I understand now to be 'transition pedagogy', which Kift, Nelson and Clarke (2010, p. 2) describe as 'a conceptualisation that has the optimal capacity to deliver an integrated and holistic FYE [First Year Experience], when intentionally designed first year curriculum is harnessed to mediate the learning experiences of diverse commencing cohorts'.

Through this work I developed a close relationship with our Widening Participation Department and developed many events and activities for groups of children that had been identified across the South Coast of England through their social classification (social class/area of habitation/family income). These
children were those that were thought to have the potential to progress to Higher Education if appropriate support mechanisms were in place. These activities included workshops, taster days and a Summer School called Chi Rocks. As a passionate educator I felt an ethical obligation to use my acquired position within the University to help others. Most recently I joined a conservatoire in 2012 as the Head of Learning Enhancement. The conservatoire sector is small but internationally and artistically important and our institutions function as sites for artistic training. I now work in an institutional role that cuts across different subject areas and I develop Learning and Teaching strategies within the organisation. I was also awarded a National Teaching Fellowship by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in March 2013, predominantly for my work in promoting the profile of Widening Participation within Higher Education curriculums in Music and the Performing Arts. This further develops my positionality: I am not only an insider that identifies with the concept of Widening Participation as my professional positionality requires me to engage with the direct impact of Widening Participation in curriculum and institutional infrastructure. This provides me with a reference point on how policy and practice intersect in very complex ways.

As I became more aware of my interest in Widening Participation I decided that although I work specifically within Music, I was most interested in the pedagogical frameworks being developed. The Professional Practice focus of the EdD at Exeter was attractive to me because of the focus on my professional context. I was mindful that I did not want to base my work in Widening Participation solely on my own experience of transition pedagogy as a learner or as a practitioner. The EdD was an opportunity to reflect and to engage deeply with my educational practice and specifically explore Widening Participation to music within Higher Education contexts. Having trained in music but specialising in musicology or ‘criticism’, which takes a predominantly theoretical approach to understanding and researching music, the EdD was a new way of interrogating what I was undertaking in my professional practice. As with many academics in Higher Education, I had highly developed skills, knowledge and understanding within my discipline. Articulating these in relation to my teaching, and importantly my work with non-traditional participants in Higher Education felt very underdeveloped. The EdD was a chance to
investigate this.

I intended to focus primarily on Widening Participation, from the perspective of constructing effective Widening Participation pathways into Undergraduate music programmes. I had planned to create a piece of research that would enable me to establish practice-informed activity that outlined different approaches and practices that could be utilised within music Widening Participation. What became more obvious, (reflected in my growing dissatisfaction of the types of research that had been already conducted, such as the work of Gorard et al, 2007) was the ‘uncritical’ nature of how Widening Participation was considered. I started to suggest the lack of a philosophical treatment of Widening Participation contributed to the development of regulatory accountability rather than deeply interrogative pieces of thinking that can hold Widening Participation to a critical account. This notion became a theme as I began to explore the field more critically and appears further in Chapter Two as part of the Literature Review.

My initial work submitted in Part One of the EdD programme explored dissatisfaction with Widening Participation as a national agenda and as a localised practice, including my own. I started to understand that my practice was uncritical in that I was blindly working under a sense of moral obligation of recognising my privileged position within Higher Education rather than rational interrogation of why I was doing it. I was also deeply concerned by what I felt to be an industrial approach to Widening Participation activity with a ‘pack them in’ approach, driven by an economic rationale rather than an educational one. Through a change in role and responsibility within Higher Education, and by developing an institutional responsibility for learning and teaching, I then became very interested in the discourse of the neoliberal impact on Higher Education. My positionality changed once more, this time politically to include greater understanding of my role within Higher Education more broadly and its future development.

What has developed here is a manifestation of these intersectional interests that position Widening Participation within the current discourse surrounding the neoliberal impact on Higher Education (for example Hill, 2007; Holmwood, 2011 and Docherty, 2011). In no way do I wish to undermine the relevance of work
that colleagues are engaged in with research into Widening Participation. The work reviewed as part of the research presented here has served many purposes and has no doubt enabled many individuals to engage with Higher Education. What I advocate is a greater criticality relating to the political motivations surrounding notions of Widening Participation within Higher Education discourse. I suggest more ideologically orientated critiques of how Widening Participation further embeds hegemonic practices of knowledge transfer within the Higher Education sector and functions in a broader social function as part of a neoliberal construction. An understanding of this position could be of benefit to all participants within Higher Education.

1.3 Background to Widening Participation

The importance of Widening Participation lies in the notion that Higher Education enables individuals from non-traditional and underrepresented backgrounds to be able to personally gain from the perceived benefits of a Higher Education. This section provides a brief overview of what Widening Participation is and how it has developed to establish a context for this research and some of the issues that are discussed throughout.

The most common identifier of what Widening Participation to Higher Education focuses on is increasing participants from socio-cultural backgrounds that have lower representation within the Higher Education sector. This is based on ethnicity, gender, and economic background including familial income. These backgrounds are identifiers in both research literature and statistical data gathering and have been used to establish the precedent that certain backgrounds can have a disadvantaged effect on opportunity and aspirations for progression to Higher Education. Thomas (2001, p. 5) identified two distinctive qualifiers that are still relevant 14 years after they were classified. The first is a non-economic driver: ‘a greater diversity of people participate in formal education and other learning activities’. This driver focuses Widening Participation discourse on a widening of participation. In contrast, Thomas also highlights an expansion of numbers progressing to Higher Education relating to economic development. Thomas suggests this second economic form of discourse places little or no importance on diversity. Literature that would later critique the development of a commodified Higher Education focuses on the
second driver as a political characteristic of Widening Participation (e.g. McCaig, 2011).

Another common identifier of Widening Participation is that it involves some form of interventional activity or programme of activity. This could be through the collaboration between institutions (i.e. a university and a target school) and the development of a series of interventional activities. These activities may take the form of taster days or workshops for students who have been identified as potential Higher Education candidates. Other formats can include outreach projects or Access programmes in an adult education centre (see for example Burke, 2002). These formats generate relationships between learner and facilitator as a primary mechanism for developing competency and the required confidence in acquiring and synthesising knowledge to demonstrate appropriateness for Higher Education progression. The content of the activity or programme is variable and there is no common framework for intervention activities. The relationship between these interventional activities and subject centres within HEIs is also variable. This means that Widening Participation activity could be instrumental (i.e. instructional) rather than discipline focused and may not have suitable progression structures in place for a particular pathway. Exceptions to this are programmes such as Pathways to Law, which is a collaborative programme established in 2006 by the Sutton Trust and the former College of Law (Sutton Trust, 2015). The lack of framework is alluded to in Fair Access to the Professional Careers (Great Britain. Cabinet Office, 2012), which establishes an agenda for progression into the professions such as law and medicine. This, however, also reasserts the predilection for certain subjects to carry a greater importance in regard to the potential for economic and social success.

Participation in Higher Education is seen as a way of enabling individuals to attain more wealth and subsequent well-being than without it and therefore can contribute more to a ‘Knowledge Economy’ i.e. where knowledge creation has an economic imperative and an exchange-value (Watts, 2006). It is a concept that is presented as a mechanism of social justice that enables a dismantling of the perceived elitism of Higher Education where only a small percentage of the population had previously been eligible to benefit from it. Within this same model students from these traditionally underrepresented backgrounds would
be less likely to progress to Higher Education. For example, between the Academic Years 2003/4 – 2009/10, UK BME participation in Higher Education increased from 14.9% to 18.1 % (Singh, 2012) and between 2009/10-2011/12, participation rates have remained at 20% (HEFCE, 2012b).

HEFCE commissioned four reports on Widening Participation projects and funded initiatives in the early and mid 1990s that document activity from around UK Institutions (HEFCE, 1994; 1995; 1996a; 1996b). Widening Participation as a concept started to coalesce within policy influencing reports in 1997 with the release of Dearing’s (1997) National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education Report. In the same year, the Further Education Funding Council published the Learning Works Report (Kennedy, 1997). Jones (2008) identifies this ‘Kennedy Report' as one of the initial articulations of Widening Participation in the contemporary educational context. It made links between issues of access to post-compulsory education with notions of equality and in particular the under-representation of social classes. The report clearly made the link between an increasingly diverse educational population, economic and social success being reliant on higher levels of education, and achievement of social justice through Widening Participation in Further Education contexts. Kennedy (1997, p. 15) claimed in the report:

‘We must widen participation not simply increase it. Widening participation means increasing access to learning and providing opportunities for success and progression to a much wider cross-section of the population than now. All those who are not fulfilling their potential or who have underachieved in the past must be drawn into successful learning. Widening Participation in post-16 learning will create a self-perpetuating learning society.’

1.3.1 Examples of Widening Participation Activity

Widening Participation has manifested within different practices and infrastructural changes within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). To delineate how Widening Participation can function I have identified four examples that will serve to provide an initial outline. These are not critiques, which come in subsequent chapters, but as a simple way of describing some articulations of
Widening Participation activity:

• The development of Foundation Degrees: David Blunkett (2000) launched Foundation Degrees in his speech *Modernising Higher Education*. These vocationally orientated programmes sought to offer different progression routes and were more vocationally orientated. This vocational emphasis was identified as being more attractive to students from non-traditional and underrepresented backgrounds because of the direct link between learning and work. The intention to establish and develop Foundation degrees was described as contributing to: ‘widening participation by providing flexible and accessible progression routes for young people starting careers, those in employment, and those returning to work’ (Foundation Degree Task Force, 2004, p. 9).

• *Aim Higher*: proposed in the 2003 White Paper *The Future of Higher Education*, (Great Britain Department for Education and Skills, 2003) this was a HEFCE funding stream that ran from 2003 – 2011 that had the broad aim to: ‘widen participation in higher education (HE) by raising awareness, aspirations and attainment among learners from under-represented groups’ (HEFCE, 2012a). It provided local *Aim Higher* hubs that worked with schools and HEIs to develop Widening Participation activities and track participants’ progression. Funding was withdrawn in 2011.

• HESA return: An annual data collection exercise by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) whereby an Institution reports on their student profile. This report enables HESA and HEFCE to understand the demographic of the intake and current constituent make up of any HEI in the country. Through this they are able to report to government on targets that have been set and also challenge institutions that are not meeting the performance indicators relating to participation rates. This has a knock-on effect of institutional expectations regarding changes to admissions and curricula to ensure progression and retention.

• Access Agreements: Since 2006 all HEIs who intend to charge above the basic rate of tuition fees have been required to submit to the Office of Fair Access (OFFA) an annual Access Agreement (OFFA, 2015). This agreement was given even higher importance in 2011 after the rise in the
cap on tuition fees to £9000. These agreements outline mechanisms, initiatives and other activity by which they intend to meet their legislative responsibilities in promoting fair access, including institutionally specific underrepresented groups. An institution must have their agreement approved by OFFA before they are able to charge a higher rate of tuition fee. Therefore, these agreements serve as a performance indicator of an institution. It also provides a stimulus to an institution to promote changes to practices that will enable it to meet its strategic objectives in this area.

Institutions have developed specific responses to the Widening Participation agenda. Policy developments such as Progression Agreements with providers of Further Education that have low progression rates into Higher Education are one such example. These agreements can be unilateral or subject specific and can include guaranteed interviews for those individuals who meet certain criteria such as projected grades. Other practices adopted by institutions and departments include Taster or Progression Days where school pupils are introduced to the institution or subject in Higher Education. Link tutors are another form of mechanism an institution may employ. These are members of academic staff within an HEI who form relationships with FE colleges and schools and in some cases particular subject areas. They can advise potential applicants on programme details and application processes. In particular, their role is to outline the nature of Higher Education, how study at this level may be accessed and what benefit it could have to the individuals.

1.4 Background to Higher Education

The nature of what type of Higher Education an individual or groups of individuals would be accessing is a significant part of this study. Where some commentators (for example Gorard et al, 2007) have taken a broad descriptive approach to what Higher Education is, the research presented here uses the more recent discourse of a commodified Higher Education as a context. A brief outline of this is helpful as scene setting for the research conducted.

The discourse of the marketisation of Higher Education identifies the construction of knowledge as transformed ways of ‘knowing’ into a way of ‘paying’ (Furedi, 2011). As such it therefore holds some form of power or
synthetic currency that enables the traversing of the knowledge society. This shift in ideology can be introduced through a brief historical outline of the major changes to Higher Education in the UK. This marketisation of knowledge is fundamentally seen as an attempt to control ideological supremacy through the control of Higher Education and as such Salter and Tapper (1994) produced one of the first significant texts exploring the reforms in Higher Education from a critically historical perspective. They describe the developing fracture between the state and Higher Education and also articulate the reasons why the state aims to control Higher Education as a mechanism of social mobility. Following Foucault in exploring the relationship between how knowledge is governed they describe ‘in its dealings with Higher Education, the state is obliged to recognise that universities perform a key social function by controlling the individual and occupational mobility necessary for social change’ (p. 5). If it is in the state’s interest to have a skilled workforce to ensure a continuation of the Knowledge Economy then it must utilise and broker participation by the main mechanism by which an idealised form of ‘knowledge’ is housed, maintained and developed.

Salter and Tapper (1994) do however highlight that regardless of opinions about the current state of Higher Education the pre-marketisation era was not itself a ‘golden age’ due to the inherent elitism and inequality within the system. This observation of inequality is suggested to be the foundation of a rationale for expansion and consumerism in Higher Education but it is important to remember that an early 20th century emphasis on elitism and anti-vocationalism can be contrasted with the post-WWII expansion of Higher Education. In particular, the acceptance and promotion of applied or vocational knowledge appears to be the site through which much of this discourse takes place. Salter and Tapper projected an understanding of Higher Education within a liberal context to be a continuation of an elite identity that is concurrent with a view of a social and cultural function. For them, the development of Higher Education within the UK is:

‘...[A]n activity concerned with much more than simply the transmission of knowledge. Within the liberal educational experience, high-status culture was absorbed as a natural part of college life...but to be successful as a means for maintaining elite identity, liberal education also has to be exclusive: it has to foster a suspicion of non-elite forms of education and, in particular, of vocational
education. So where as it will applaud the importance of learning for learning’s sake...it finds applied knowledge worthy of indifference at best’ (p. 9).

Salter and Tapper (1994) establish the theoretical premise for what would later develop as Foundation Degrees, introduced in 2000. These could be seen as an example of a state promoted infrastructural change that served to challenge and redress the way in which knowledge was controlled and transmitted, particularly under the guise of social justice. Within this example, knowledge is directly related to vocational development. As Salter and Tapper continued to outline, if Higher Education has a role in the control of social mobility it is also in control of a socio-cultural role that can promote or reject particular values: it has ideological power. This ideological power can be described in how Foucault outlined the relationship between control of knowledge and control of power: ‘there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 27).

Since the 1960s, the state has held an interest in managing Higher Education and the institutions that provide it through a variety of processes. These processes include financial, administrative, legal and most importantly, according to Salter and Tapper (1994), more overt ideological positioning. The post-war expansion, in some ways necessitated by a depleted workforce, is cited in discussions relating to a shift in ideological positioning of Higher Education associated with the ‘Robbins Report’ of Higher Education (Robbins, 1963). In this report the aims of Higher Education were identified as being: ‘Instruction in skills... not mere specialists but rather cultivated men and women; advancement of learning; transmission of common culture and common standards of citizenship’ (Robbins Report, pp. 6-7; also cited in Salter and Tapper, 1994 p. 11 and Unterhalter and Carpentier, 2010, p. 7).

The Robbins Report targeted an expansion of Higher Education for a public "good", and the focus of education being an unquestionable good is a concept that Alvesson (2013) later explores. By suggesting an alternative to the way in which knowledge is organised, changes in the value of Higher Education could likewise be conditioned. It is, perhaps, in retrospect, fairly easy to trace this focus on Higher Education’s responsibility in producing ‘common standards of
citizens’ (Robbins, 1963, pp. 6-7). It is also possible that the more citizens you have being moulded within these aims the more control can be exerted by dominant political powers in contrast to the rhetoric of removal of state interference in regulation, mimicking the market model of neoliberalism. Foucault (2008) would pre-empt this in his articulation of the influence of neoliberalism on structures of power and knowledge. In this way, the dominant ideology prescribes what is perceived as a "good" citizen as well as the process by which this status is attained.

Brown and Carasso (2013) traced the changes in UK Higher Education through a survey of policy and legislation and created an account of those changes. This work documented the new relationships and infrastructures developed in the UK in 1980s that included a reorganisation of the University Grants Committee (UGC) and the research councils that were combined with a newly formed Department of Education and Science (DES). Salter and Tapper (1994) had also suggested previously that this was a major factor impacting on the accountability and control of institutions. Higher Education became ‘less peripheral’ and more answerable to one specific government department. The establishment of one governmental department meant a more intense focus rather than many different organisations all competing and setting objectives for institutions to follow (p.7).

While the transformation of the Higher Education landscape was taking place in the UK during the 1980s, Bok (1986, p.13) had previously offered an alternative perspective from the US Higher Education system, highlighting the change from relative autonomy to the financial controls exerted in the 1980s in the UK. He also reasserted the relationship between education and the market model as not being peculiar to the neoliberal context. Bok identified the outcome of educational attainment in the 19th century was a technological competitiveness and Higher Education was required to fill the gap in the market place.

The promotion of education within the 1990s political arenas was expressed through the wake of the Further and Higher Education Reform Act (Great Britain, Further and Higher Education Reform Act 1992: Elizabeth II. Chapter 13, 1992) and the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education chaired by Dearing (1997). Labour leader and future Prime Minister, Tony Blair’s
'Education, Education, Education' position in the 1990s manoeuvred education to become a political and cultural "buzzword" (TLRP, 2008). The combination of this mantra and the 1997 Dearing Report would establish the foundations of a 21st century market model ideology of Higher Education. This was articulated in the 2003 White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* (Great Britain. Department of Education and Skills, 2003) and achieved through the 2004 Higher Education Act (Great Britain. Higher Education Act 2004: Elizabeth II. Chapter 8, 2004). These outlined a focus on achieving participation rates of 50% of 19-21 year olds in full time Higher Education. At the same time, the source of funding for Higher Education started to change with the introduction of fees through the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998. The maximum fee then increased to £3000 per annum following the Higher Education Act 2004. Following recommendations by Browne (2010) in *Securing a sustainable future for Higher Education* tuition fees were further increased to a maximum of £9000 per annum as approved within the Education Act 2011 (Great Britain. Education Act 2011: Elizabeth II. Chapter 21, 2011) and introduced in 2012.

The relationship between the establishment of fees and their subsequent rise was seen as a contradictory element of Labour’s Widening Participation Agenda (Callender, 2002) and this was further compounded with the shift of the political home of Higher Education. In 2009, the department within which Higher Education sat (Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills) became the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Curtis, 2009). At the time this move was highlighted by the University and Colleges Union as concerning because of what seemed to be suggested in this move: ‘further and higher education are no longer considered important enough to have a department of their own. The fact they have been lumped in with business appears to be a clear signal of how the government views colleges and universities and their main roles in this country’ (Ibid). With Higher Education being perceived as part of the business and economic models an ideological shift in the presentation and governance of Higher Education was changing too.

Seville and Tooley (1997, p. 13) had previously started to predict increased state involvement with Higher Education influencing the ‘market like processes’ that exists within obtaining a degree. Seville and Tooley (pp. 20-1) and Salter and Tapper (1994) focused on identifying increased state control and key
characteristics of Higher Education that make it socially and economically valuable. This would later be articulated through notions of certain discipline prioritisation such as the sciences and engineering.

Walton (2011, p. 16) reiterated Bok’s previous identification of misconceptions of a golden age of higher education when reasoning about the "idea" of the University as distinct from the more general concept of Higher Education that may include different sites of Higher Education delivery, such as the conservatoire. Walton presents an identification of the Corporate University, which behaves ‘as if they were public limited companies, operating under the rubric of ‘shareholder value’...This enshrined the doctrine that the sole duty of a company was to maximise the financial return to its shareholders...’ (pp. 22-23). Here Walton contrasted a notion of ‘invading ideologies of entrepreneurism, competition and managerialism’ against what is described as a ‘priestly vocation [of academics], an attachment to academic activity as a value and an end in itself’. Here, Walton used the closing of unprofitable departments to exemplify the rise of the Corporate University, whilst also questioning how best to combat and battle for ‘further survival, and revival, of real universities in an utterly philistine political environment’ (p. 25).

This notion of a real or ideal university would be furthered in Collini’s (2012) assessment of the purpose of the University in the 21st century. Collini provided a defence of intellectual enquiry for its own sake as a value of Higher Education, and in particular within the humanities. Here, Collini offered a broad historical account with the intention of locating the concept of the University within an intellectual project to be honoured and protected. Collini (2012) reiterates what Giroux and Giroux (2004) earlier suggested in relation to the role that Higher Education is perceived to play in the construction of the social identities of its learners. This "given" is the inherent value of learning and Collini suggests this may be an example of the socially and historically constructed values present within the disciplines themselves. The shift that Collini highlighted from a liberal learning philosophy to one that is based on instrumental conditioning (i.e. Thorndike, 1905) may be felt more forcefully within disciplines that have not been predicated so much on a transactional learning pedagogy:
‘[The] economic philistinism of insisting that the activities carried on in universities need to be justified, perhaps can only be justified, by demonstrating their contribution to the economy. In the face of this, one has to make, over and over again, the obvious point that a society does not educate the next generation in order for them to contribute to its economy. It educates them in order that they should extend and deepen their understanding of themselves, and the world, acquiring, in the course of this form of growing up, kinds of knowledge and skill which will be useful in their eventual employment, but which will no more be the sum of their education than that employment will be the sum of their lives’ (Collini, 2012, pp. 90-91).

In this way, Collini (2012) suggests here that the economic rationalisation of education reduces learning to be equal only to the type and nature of subsequent employment. It necessarily then requires paradigms of learning that are justified by the sum employment potential of its graduates. In addition Collini is clearly positioning the idea that learning and knowledge is almost intangible. The idea that education is related to self-actualization and should not be transferable into a monetary value system is particularly significant in understanding how Higher Education can be a powerful tool as part of an ideological power. Williams’ (2013) identified the shift from liberal learning for learning’s sake to learning that contributes to an economy. This could, Williams suggested, be seen to be representative of a broader cultural shift in justifying intrinsic social value of an individual within a capitalist framework. This would also suggest that the role of Higher Education is not just a site for the creation of knowledge, but also part of a way of reinforcing or subverting a hegemonic power. This is not a new recognition of the role Higher Education plays in power discourse but the contextual framework does suggest a difference in the visibility of this hegemony.

As a reaction to learners increasingly bearing the cost of a Higher Education in England, conceptualisation regarding the reforms in Higher Education started to change. Instead of historically accounting for these changes, politically charged academics such as Maskell and Robinson (2002), Bailey and Freedman (2011) and Docherty (2011), working within and across disciplines started to question the role these changes would have, and in particular the type of Higher Education that will be generated in the future. These authors also began asking
if the future of Higher Education will produce a Higher Education anyone aside from corporations would want. In particular, the idea of a corporate Higher Education expressed through skill acquisition would stand as a threat to how education is related to the generation of new knowledge.

A "defence" was established against the market model being incorporated within Higher Education and specifically the ‘University’ as a site of intellectual freedom. One of these collections (ed. Holmwood, 2011) suggested a manifesto to reclaim the notion of a ‘Public University’. This Public University is part of a broader cultural reaction to the growing corporatisation of Higher Education. The assortment of essays within Holmwood’s collection, written from a variety of subject perspectives, provides a major account reflecting on the threat that academics have felt the marketisation of Higher Education has posed to knowledge and learning. Across all the contributions is the notion that University is a public good and funding for teaching and research should be in recognition of this rather than rely on the individual learner baring the cost of their own Higher Education.

What is particularly interesting within the Holmwood (2011) collection is an afterword, by the current Vice Chancellor of the University of Exeter. Smith (2011, p. 127 in Holmwood, 2011) suggests that the reforms to the sector in the UK are positive and will strengthen the overall standing of Higher Education in relation to its global competitors. Smith also highlights three myths perpetuated from the changes, particularly about the cost of getting a Higher Education: 1. Funding for Higher Education has been reduced (p. 134); 2. This funding cut will lead to the loss of humanities and social sciences (pp. 134-5); and 3. These changes will replace barriers broken down previously preventing students from poorer backgrounds entering Higher Education (p. 135). In short, Smith presents an argument that suggests the funding of humanities and social sciences is not about ‘how much’ but more ‘where from’? This is a significant semantic argument because it is precisely the removal of state funding for the arts, humanities and social sciences that suggest they have little value in the eyes of the state nor can they if the state is utilising neoliberal ideological positioning.

McGettigan (2013) refutes many of the issues that Smith claims are myths and
predicts the impact of the changes to the sector. In particular he identified the selling off of the Student Loan Book by the Government, which occurred in part after the publication of the text. Importantly, McGettigan looks at the transformation of the Higher Education sector from a public sector service for the ‘public good’ to that which is bound by investment codes and governed by profit.

Readings (1996) had explored the ‘ruination’ of the United States’ university system by corporate models, and assessed the fall of traditional values as a necessary change to an outmoded institution. Rolfe (2013) continues this work in generating a call for the University (identified as distinct from the more general Higher Education sector) to become a place of subversion and reducing hegemonic power through the inhabitation of the ruins of the ‘University’. Yet, instead of accepting the corporation as a proxy for Higher Education, Rolfe argues for a way that those within the sector can undermine the extremes of its neoliberal appropriation, by first understanding the disintegration of the University. Rolfe describes this as resulting in ‘component parts due largely to the administrative demand for specialist workers to take on responsibility for the delivery of the different elements of the university mission, each of which targets separate funding streams’ (pp. 75-76). Financial imperatives, Rolfe alludes to here, have generated a system that models corporate behaviour and process and results in the saturation of Higher Education with the ‘University of Excellence’.

It is possible to find examples of what Rolfe (2013) describes as this ‘University of Excellence’ in many different HEI marketing strategies. The University of Wolverhampton is the ‘University of Opportunity’ (Anon, 2015a); Plymouth University is the ‘Enterprise University’ (Anon, 2015b); and the University of Chichester has emblazoned buses that serve to connect its campuses with the motif: ‘Your Community, Your University’. Rolfe (2013) generates the idea that a subversive culture could be created that would run parallel to the corporate ‘University of Excellence’. Rolfe’s notion would ‘subvert...the mission of a dis-integrated, task-centred university as a commercial enterprise and to propose in its place a parallel ‘fourth mission’, which aims to reunite and reintegrate the vision, structure, people, relationships and activities of the academy as a rhizomatic network dedicated to the practice of radical scholarship’ (p. 77).
Rolfe describes this idea as a ‘Paraversity’, which subverts the notion of a mission and highlights the need to create new contexts that generate potentially subversive parallels to the hegemonic practices in order to reclaim agency (p. 80). The ‘Paraversity’ can be seen as a continuation of the University of Excellence as it is running parallel rather than replacing it but at the same time promotes a potential for subverting the dominant practices in Higher Education and in particular subverting a perceived encroachment on Higher Education by neoliberalism.

1.5 Introducing the neoliberal context

This introduction has already referred to neoliberalism as a market-model form of capitalism. To prepare more fully for a positioning of Widening Participation within this ideological context, this section will provide an overview of what neoliberalism is considered to be.

Neoliberalism is a concept constructed as a capitalist ideology. It is based on market models of free trade and reductions in state interference in the governance of a free market but combined with aspirations of individual liberty and freedom. The distinction between the neoliberal form of capitalism and more generic capitalist action is the premise of democracy through wealth generation. This wealth is generated predominantly through a Knowledge Economy. The concept became dominant throughout the 20th century and was defined against a backdrop of global unrest and changing political and economic platforms. Boas and Gans-Morse (2009, p. 139) highlighted the changing uses of the term from an originally positive utilisation that literally indicated a new liberalism defined by the Freiberg School of Economics in the post-World War II period as ‘moderate in comparison to classical liberalism, both in its rejection of laissez-faire policies and its emphasis on humanistic values’. In short, it was used in a way that was ‘almost opposite of how it is commonly used today’ (Ibid).

Duménil and Lévy (2005) describe neoliberalism as: ‘...the ideology of the market and private interests as opposed to state intervention’ (p. 9). The lack however, of ‘a clearly defined set of invariant features’ enables neoliberalism to appear across ‘a wide range of social, political and economic phenomena at different levels of complexity’ (Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2005, p. 1). This
generates some neoliberal practices that are easily characterised yet others are more difficult to locate or identify. The result is neoliberalism becomes a catchall term. This fluidity in defining and identifying neoliberal apparatus, mechanisms and practices could be construed as a conceptual weakness. Certainly, as Boas and Gans-Morse (2009) identified in their survey of the use of the term in social science research outputs, the concept of neoliberalism is applied asymmetrically: ‘it is used frequently by those who are critical of free markets, but rarely by those who view marketization more positively.’ (p. 138). They also identified that it is often left undefined within empirical research and in addition, it has such wide employment in research outputs that they do not help identify ‘what it actually means’ (pp. 138-9).

The wide utilisation and multifaceted interpretation of the term neoliberalism makes it difficult to identify within Higher Educational practices until it is formulated into some kind of specific action or practice. This is because those who do view it positively rarely use it as an actual identifier or concept to describe their beliefs or actions (Boas and Gans-Morse, 2009, p. 138). Within this thesis, neoliberalism will be taken to mean a market model of capitalism that promotes a social justice and democracy through capitalist gain. To understand this further I will now establish some of the wider discourse relating neoliberalism to Higher Education

1.5.1 The relationship between neoliberalism and Higher Education

The economic underpinnings of neoliberalism can be understood equally as a complex appropriation and reinterpretation of many different intersecting ideas. Clarke (2005) reiterates the notion that historically locating neoliberalism’s specific ‘starting point’ is not possible but traces it back to Adam Smith. Lapavitsas (2005, p. 31) asserts that neoliberalism appeared out of the decline of post-war Keynesianism economics and this resulted in ‘little more than the re-emergence of the old belief that the capitalist economy is essentially crisis-free’. The work of Friedman in the 1970s as a response to the collapse of Keynesianism ‘resurrected the Quantity Theory of Money...[and] argued that capitalist economies have a ‘natural rate’ of unemployment, and any attempt to bring the actual rate of unemployment below the ‘natural’ would merely lead to inflation’ (Ibid). In other words by restricting the money supply, inflation would
be controlled. Inflation, as the major economic problem of the 1970s was ‘treated by Friedman as a purely monetary phenomenon resulting from too much money chasing after too few goods’ (Ibid). Friedman’s previous work (1962) had outlined the belief that individuals should take responsibility for investing in their own Higher Education. He suggested that ‘individuals should bear the costs of investment in themselves and receive the rewards. They should not be prevented by market imperfections from making the investment when they are willing to bear the costs’ (p. 105).

Lapavitsas (2005) identified the evolution of Friedman’s work in that of Lucas in the 1980s who claimed ‘longlasting excess supply is not possible. If there is unemployment, that is the result of government policy itself, i.e. of wrong-headed attempts to force aggregate output above levels warranted by the free economic choices of those who participate in the capitalist economy’ (p. 34). The enduring influence of this work is summarised as the notion that ‘government macroeconomic intervention is worse than useless – it is actually counterproductive’ (Ibid). This revival of an individualist agenda assumes that individuals are rational and seek to maximise their own behaviour. This contradicts a macroeconomic position that attempts to control and understand an economy in its national, regional and global iterations.

According to Boas and Gans-Morse (2009, p. 144) neoliberalism invokes ‘normative ideas about the proper role of individuals versus collectives and a particular conception of freedom as an overarching social value’. This is described by Marxist scholar Harvey (2007, p. 24) who identifies the appropriation of certain ‘conceptual apparatus’ including traditional liberal ideas of ‘political ideals of individual liberty and freedom as sacrosanct as the central values of civilization’ (Ibid) but reinterpreted within a free market model of economics. The use of principles of freedom and liberty are, Harvey suggests, well chosen because of their assumed resonance with many people in highlighting the potential for the individual growth and development. This enables the concept of neoliberalism to permeate through different forms of political agendas without necessarily being recognised as such. Harvey suggests this is a benefit particularly in the global post- World War II anxiety that manifested in tensions in South America and Asia in the 1970s. Here, Harvey suggests, notions of liberty and free trade were used by the UK and the
US in the 1980s as a rhetorical defence against the danger of ideologies rising up around the globe in opposition (for example, the US and UK governments’ support of the rule of Pinochet in Chile).

Crouch (2011) examined the idea that at one point towards the end of the 20th century, neoliberalism had appeared to have ‘run its course’, only to re-emerge in the early 21st century within, for example, the ‘Big Society’ manifesto of the Conservative Party (2010) in the UK General Election. The results of this manifesto include deregulation of services; increased numbers of free schools and academy chains; the increase of fees for studying in Higher Education and the reduction of Teaching Grants for the same. This ‘new social order’, currently undergoing its own form of globalisation (i.e. spreading across the globe) is described by Duménil and Lévy (2005) as referring to new rules of how capitalism functions. It is identified through the key characteristics of how the centre (i.e. lenders and shareholders) and the periphery (i.e. labour and labour management) relate to each other. In particular, the removal of state intervention relating to development and welfare and the growth of financial institutions and new relationships between financial and non-financial sectors are highlighted (p. 10).

The promotion of a market model that creates a different social dynamic is a centralised idea within neoliberal practice. Apple (2001 p. 413) suggests that the market model is not a model of action, but a metaphor, one that can be marketed to those ‘who will exist in it and live with its effects’. Apple also highlights ‘[m]arkets, as well, are supposedly less subject to political interference and the weight of bureaucratic procedures. Furthermore, they are grounded in the rational choices of individual actors. Thus, markets and the guarantee of rewards for effort and merit are to be coupled together to produce ‘neutral yet positive, results’ (p. 413). The market model within neoliberal ideology functions to promote trade that is free from interference from government and reduces constraints on how products (goods or services and more recently more abstract concepts like knowledge as a commodity or currency) are supplied and consumed.

**1.6 Outline of thesis**

By understanding the discourse surrounding the expansion and apparent
commodification of Higher Education, it is then possible to understand more deeply the way in which Widening Participation functions contextually. That is not to say that there is one set of ‘real’ or idealised previous formulations of social relations that Higher Education should strive to return to – this form of nostalgia is equally problematic. The important aspect is not the unpacking of a constructed binary between perceptions of traditional purposes of Higher Education and what is currently practiced. This idea of a constructed binary is examined as a predominant method of research within much of the Widening Participation literature reviewed in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three the methodological approach of this study is outlined in relation to how I have established which part of the field I am working within.

The intention of generating a critical framework for Widening Participation here is to begin to understand how it has performed within the context of a commodified Higher Education. This will be explored through the application of critical lenses in Chapters Four to Six. It has been suggested here that since the early 1980s, Higher Education has been a crucial part of political rhetoric relating to social justice and the viability of economic growth within a ‘Knowledge Economy’. This is examined in Chapter Four. Chapters Four and Five explore how the suggested changes in social relations within in Higher Education are a way to further understand the commodification of Higher Education and Widening Participation. Chapter Six develops this in relation to how learning and teaching is conceptualised within this framework and specifically critiques the notion of pedagogical development for the 'right' of access to Higher Education.

The concluding chapter is one that discusses and draws together the major themes of the thesis within the form of a framework of concepts. I also map out the contribution to current discourse that this thesis makes. In particular, I focus on the contribution to the discourse of Widening Participation and to that of the commodification of Higher Education. In particular, I assert the implications of my theoretical framework on my practice.
Chapter Two: 
Literature Review

2. Introduction

The aim of this Literature Review is to present a clear overview of the field of Widening Participation to Higher Education, within which this study is situated. This chapter provides an introduction to the significant critical frameworks through which Widening Participation is predominantly conceptualised. This is followed by a brief overview of the chronological development of research into Widening Participation that allows for the subsequent sections to outline the key thematic trends present through that development. Finally, this review establishes an area within Widening Participation research that is relatively small but within which this study is aligned, namely the relationship between Widening Participation and neoliberalism.

The chapter is divided into sections that enable an understanding of how the field of research into Widening Participation developed. This allows for the establishment of a platform from which to then interrogate the relationship between Widening Participation and neoliberalism through different theoretical lenses within the rest of the thesis. Refined research aims that take the generalised concerns outlined in Chapter One but respond to the Widening Participation field of research established in this Chapter are expressed at the conclusion to this chapter. As this study is a critical study, positioning the refined research aims in relation to the field represented in the literature is important. By doing this it demonstrates the positioning of the research concerns directly with the field rather than the influence of the researcher's own positionality as a dominating frame of reference.

One of the problems this Literature Review faced as the research progressed was the number of intersecting issues that seemed to be of importance in unpacking Widening Participation as a concept. These are expressed in Chapters Three to Six so here I focus on the specific issues relating to the identification of the Widening Participation field. A strategy to focus on the specific chronological development of Widening Participation as a research concept was decided upon to establish clearly what the field of Widening Participation research actually consisted of. The literature presented here was examined because it directly relates to Widening Participation. The structure of
the first part of this chapter is divided broadly into two components: the first is a brief chronological overview of the development of the research field of a specifically identified notion of Widening Participation to Higher Education. The second section of this first part is an investigation into the thematic development of research topics. Key themes that emerged include Policy and governance; Institutional and national initiatives; Impact on Learning and Teaching; and Social Justice. These themes are followed by the second part of the chapter that focuses on a small but important sub-field of Widening Participation research. This sub-field focuses on the conceptualisation of the term and introduces the idea of viewing Widening Participation through different critical lenses to offer alternative perspectives. It is within this sub-field I place the resultant study presented here.

2.1 Critical Frameworks
The development of Widening Participation research broadly sits within a liberal tradition that assumes a right to successful educational practices that will enable the individual to participate fully in society. Widening Participation to Higher Education discourse can be seen to connect studies on class, race, gender, sexuality and disability along with political, cultural and social theory. Nuances that begin at the point of definition are affected by context. Additionally, tensions are raised through the application of intersectional critical frameworks, largely drawn Feminist, Queer and Race theory that form foundations for assumptions and tensions within the critiques produced. Liberalist approaches promote the reducing of stereotypes and exposure to difference, whilst more radical approaches promote plurality and social reconstruction.

In particular these forms of critiques have developed in ways to protest and reconfigure dominant values and practices, and especially in relation to the way in which the body is located within these social dynamics: 'Feminist, queer, and critical race philosophers have shown us how social differences are the effects of how bodies inhabit spaces with others, and how they have emphasized the intercorporeal aspects of bodily dwelling.' (Ahmed, 2007, p.5) This suggests that the way in which the body functions in social relations and how the body is constructed socially are negotiable and transitory depending on what the dominant cultural and social values are in place. Underrepresented groups of
people, identified through their 'bodily dwelling' are thus the target of various activities and strategies at micro and macro level to investigate how to make education (in this context a Higher Education) as a fundamental activity accessible to all, and when it is not accessible, what the barriers are.

Feminist theory and critique has largely emerged as 'a form of protest by women about their exclusion from full citizenship in Western, Bourgeois society' (Evans, 1997 p. 8). This form of protest against exclusion and forms of oppression subsequently evolved into rejections of 'a particular form of heterosexuality in which women 'succumbed' to 'natural' male desire (Evans, 1997, p. 10). Liberal feminism, as with most liberalised critiques suggest that sexual inequality is the symptom of ignorance, whereas radical feminism holds that oppressive patriarchal relations create a dualistic dominant male and subordinate female (Weiner, 1995, pp.70-1). However, the feminist activist was not only concerned with the sexual body, but also the intersectional body, and over time feminist theory has come to recognise its complexity and it different meaning for women in different places (Evans 1997, p.9). In particular, this relates to women of colour and women of different class who intersect with different forms of exclusion, and it is part of the feminist paradigm that invokes and engages with the 'assertion of difference' (Evans, 1997, p.9). In relation to Higher Education, Evans suggests 'Feminist academics are part of an elite, divorced from the practices and problems of the 'real' world'. (p.22). Feminism understood as a protest against exclusion is in tension with the feminist academic precisely because of their institutional positionality. This is partly to do with the institutional knowledge a woman has access to (linked to the notion of exclusion and prior experiences both educational and social) and also the need to contest particular rather than generalised issues. Morley (1999) for example, writes in her critique of the gendered academy 'In fact, discrimination against women in the academy is a complex, messy business. It gains visibility at such key moments as those of recruitment and promotion, but it also leaks into daily practices and processes that constellate to undermine the sense of self-efficiency of many women.' (p.229) Later Morley (2007) would extend this critique to incorporate the neoliberal and relational attitudes encroaching on Higher Education driven by Market sensibilities. Leathwood and Read (2009) explore the issue of the participation of women within Higher Education and
highlight that despite the increase in participation in a majority of countries there continues to be a 'subject stratification' according to gender (p.34). The educational institution then becomes further a site that plays out the dominant power relations reflected in curriculum and pedagogy. (Weiner, 1995, p.71) This latter relates to the notion of difference and the recognition of subordinated and intersectional bodies and connects Queer and Race criticalities. Significantly, critique has shifted from understanding dualistic homogenous groups of men and women.

'Normalized identifies such as straight and stable gender identities work through, invoke, produce, constitute as well as refuse its other. Queer tries to interrupt those modes of making selves and making sense by refusing stable identifies and by producing new identification that lie outside binary models of gender and sexuality' (Luhmann, 1998, p.151).

Critiques of inclusion/exclusion and participation/non-participation in Western mechanisms of socialised citizenship emerged from the critical traditions of feminism, queer and critical race and disability theory, all of which can be said to be protests against and recognition of the subjugated an heteronormative body. hooks (1994, p.15) promoted the link between race, gender and inclusion in her work and suggested that feminist pedagogy and conventional critical pedagogy had not focused enough on the holistic and the well being of the learners as performative of freedom, and therefore proposed an engaged pedagogy, that which promotes emotion and feeling within the learning space and the self-actualisation of teacher and learner. hooks suggested '[t]o educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students' (p.13).

For Luhmann however the growth of students also raises issues of how ignorance and resistance to knowledge is examined and underpins approaches to pedagogy and inclusion. Luhmann (1998, p.150) asks 'Can we bear the knowledge that students may not be able to bear what we want them to
This suggests for Luhmann questions that reject ignorance as a lack of (political) consciousness but as a resistance to knowledge. This queering of understanding might allow teachers to become more curious about the question of resistance. For Luhmann, this suggests a queer pedagogy that 'rather than exploring, presenting and manifesting self-esteemmed queer subjects, a queer pedagogy aims at the infinite proliferation of new identifications' (p.151) and responds to what Britzman had identified a fundamental gap in critical approaches to social inequality and education: 'how can we exceed such binary oppositions as the tolerant and the tolerated, the oppressed and oppressor yet still hold onto an analysis of social difference that can account for how dynamics of subordination and subjection work....?' (1995, p. 164).

Archer, Hutchings and Leathwood (2001) discuss the way in which these critical approaches have understood representation and identity construction and focus particularly on how simultaneous positioning (i.e. class and gender or gender and race) impact on how groups are represented within sociological and educational work, particularly that exploring practices of participation (p. 44). Likewise, specific queer approaches to considering the role of pedagogy in promoting inclusion suggests that identity and representation function as both performative and transgressive. Queer approaches to inclusion have suggested that pedagogy should promote inclusiveness (along similar lines as the liberal feminists approach) and promote safe spaces that contest homophobic resistance. (Luhmann, 1998, p.147). Whereas the liberal feminist suggests that ignorance as a contrast to knowledge of inclusive, Queer approaches can suggest that ignorance and knowledge are not mutually exclusive but as constitutive of each other in similar way that queer theory decentralised understandings of hetero/homo division through the promotion of implications on the self (p.150).

'Queer pedagogy is then concerned with a radical practice of deconstructing normalcy, then it is obviously not confined to teaching as, for, or about queer subject(s)...learning becomes a process of risking the self, much like Foucault suggests: the target is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are".' (Luhmann, 1998, p.151) Access to education is considered not only a human right but the fundamental way in which social equality is obtained by ensuring
all citizens have the capability and the empowerment to participate within the
dominant social structures. Britzman (2010) challenges this assumption through
a psychoanalytic approach to contemporary educational theory and in revisiting
Freud, suggests that questioning the role of personality in the educational
relationships between teacher and leaner and results in unexplored impact on
equality and social justice through educational practices.

2.1.1 Examples of critical frameworks applied to education

Sleeter and Grant (1999) had previously outlined five general approaches, to
multicultural education, that reflect the spectrum of approaches critical traditions
were able to identify: 1. Teaching the Exceptional and the Culturally Different;
Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist. These frameworks
reflect differences in criticality applied to diversity. The spectrum ranges from
the first that teach 'strategies that remediate deficiencies or build bridges
between the student and the school' but continue to use accepted norms to
outline standards and expectations of participation (p.37) to that which
empowers specific groups (3) but at the same time is argued to continues to
reinforce hegemonic values of a dominant culture. The last framework
suggested here is that based on cultural pluralism whilst building democratic
equality in society through reconstruction and is the result of the most radical
rereading of social norms and assumptions.

Unterhalter (2005, p.16) describes 4 overarching paradigms of approaches to
gender and educational policy practices: 1. Women in Development; 2. Gender
and Development; 3. Poststructuralist; 4. Human Development. The
identification of these four approaches to framing action and thinking around
gender and education suggest a spectrum of understanding how gender
perceived in a critical way opens up discourse with a variety of different
outcomes. For example, the first framework of Women in Development links
strongly to a schooling concept of education with an understanding of gender
meaning women or girls. Equality is linked to the provision of resources and
Human Capital Theory is a dominant critical perspective. This is linked to
efficiency and economic growth. The second framework of Gender in
development understands gender as constructed social relations and deeply entrenched in power relations. Gender within this framework is complex and changing and action is focused on redistribution of power. The third framework of poststructuralism recognises shifting gender identities and as such highlights ‘subordinated identities’ and focuses on the notion of difference. Finally the forth framework of Human Development focuses on capability and inequality as a denial of the opportunity to become capable. Here, development leads to freedom.

The frameworks identified by Sleeter and Grant (1999) and Unterhalter (2005) outline how these critical research frameworks employed in different educational contexts serve different ideological and conceptual purposes. As Unterhalter identifies, the dominant approaches to research in this area focuses on links to economic growth and capability growth. Conceptual and critical literature that explores through feminist, queer and racial lenses the constructions of power, identity and other relational issues pertaining to Widening Participation exists within wider frameworks of economic growth or capability discourse. This leads to a predominant reiteration of the gaining of of freedom through capability and informs within this study the use of Alvesson (2013), Rancière (1991) and Brown (2006). Within Widening Participation research, it is possible to identify in a similar way, overarching frameworks that dominate the literature in response to approaches to Widening Participation in England that range from emphasising economic growth (particularly relating to policy development) capability denial (particularly within ideological political rhetoric and examinations of impact on Widening Participation on Learning and Teaching).

Frameworks based on more extensive conceptual frameworks (both with poststructuralist approaches and within broader activist concepts such as Gender and Race) are less dominant within the literature. This may be because of their rejection of capability as a critical assumption and therefore on the periphery of legitimised and acceptable discourse relating to Widening Participation. For example, Unterhalter, Morley and Gold (2004) suggested that the lived experience of non-traditional students, understood and critiqued from the lens of class and gender, can promote ways of delegitimising educational
practices that are unresponsive to and promote further oppressive structures within Higher Education. The use of student participation in critical discourse resonates with the choice of critical lenses employed later within this thesis, in particular the work of Rancière. The specific relationship between gender, the experience of Higher Education and constructed identifications through gender and class are understood with a nod to shifting and subordinated identities but there is a presence of capability - that through greater engagement with these subordinated identifies, the students themselves become more capable in discoursing around and through them to succeed in Higher Education.

Both Unterhalter (2005) and Sleeter and Grant's (1999) analysis of literature and approaches to critique demonstrate that within critical frameworks a wide variety of tensions and values are interplaying with the subject under investigation. The literature pertaining to Widening Participation explored here reflects similar tensions.

2.1.2 Applying Critical approaches to Widening Participation research
In exploring how these frameworks specifically influence Widening Participation discourse and research, it emerges that although Widening Participation is related to liberal and critical traditions, the influence of a neoliberal political context may have affected the criticality of how Widening Participation is explored. Exponents of this idea include Archer (2007) who suggested that these critical frameworks have been subdued in their application to Widening Participation through the appropriation of diversity rhetoric within (at the time) New Labour policy. Archer suggests that equating equality with student diversity is too simple and that a moral discourse surrounding diversity 'subdues' other critical approaches through an implicit good. Archer's commentary here links an unnamed neoliberalising of discourse and the concept of participation. Haggis (2007) concurrently discussed diversity as the cause of an unrealistic approach to meeting learner needs, driven in part by the aforementioned diversity discourse and called for a revision of critical approaches to participation and pedagogy.

This thesis explores how Widening Participation to Higher Education is linked to Neoliberal political paradigms. To do this, the literature relating to Widening
Participation is gathered here to establish a domain from which to establish what normative understandings of Widening Participation are within the dominant literature contrasted with a smaller subset of literature that critiques the concept and ideology of Widening Participation. It also suggests that to engage fully with these radical criticalities, in turn theoretical positions need to be engaged with that when applied promote a rejection of common assumptions that do not subdue the critical exploration of uncomfortable debates. Discourses of inclusion and participation within the literature examined here, suggests in the main normative political and theoretical dualisms, that do not fulfil the contestations presented within Radical Feminist, Queer and Race critiques.

2.2 Early Widening Participation Research

One of the earliest articulations of a conception of Widening Participation can be found in Alan (1992). Focusing on Disability access in Higher Education, Alan outlines how Widening Participation to Higher Education is beneficial to both participant and the sector. Literature from 1992 – 1997 are predominantly either HEFCE reports on Special Initiatives and directions for inclusion (HEFCE, 1994; HEFCE, 1995; HEFCE, 1996; HEFCE, 1996a). 1998 -1999 saw the emergence of more literature relating to specific research topics that focused more around class and ethnic background and its impact on progression and engagement with Higher Education. During this first period of research initial attempts at drawing out conceptual and practice based issues in widening access to Higher Education predominantly focused on ethnicity (e.g. Coffield and Vignoles, 1997; Panesar, 1998 and Malach 1999) and class/socio-economic disadvantage (e.g. Marjoribanks, 1998 and Bamber and Tett, 1999) as an impacting factor on engagement and progression to Higher Education.

The expansion of reports that were published in the year 2000 signified the growing importance placed on investigating the impact of Widening Participation, partly as a rationale for its own development, but also to drive
forward the development of ways of understanding what Widening Participation could actually look like. There were continued articulations of top-down approaches to policy that pushed forward the agenda of Widening Participation governance at national and institutional level (CVCP UK, 2000 and Dept. for Education and Employment, 2000); and one of the first subject specific examinations relating to medical education (Angel and Johnson, 2000) who describe initiatives and imperatives for widening the demographic of participants in their field.

The development of a significant body of research materials started to occur between 2001- 2003. Here, alongside the continuing publication of governance reports, thematic developments that had been earlier indicated started to take shape and become more stable. This is recognised in MacDonald and Stratta (2001) who describe a ‘top down’ policy approach to Widening Participation and suggest that a greater focus on what happens in practice would be beneficial. This growth of research continued throughout 2004-7 with an increase in literature (correlating in part to substantial funding of programmes such as Aim Higher). The subject of Widening Participation became embedded within educational discourse relating to inclusion, equality and economic growth.

There are two points to observe here relating to the chronological development of research literature: the drive to initiate Widening Participation is evidenced prior to Labour coming to power in 1997. The second point relates to the dearth of critical apparatus at this point from the lack of research conducted in this area that specifically took on the mantle of Widening Participation. It is possible then to see Widening Participation conceptualised by the state, not from observations of independent research. Therefore state-created boundaries and the classifications by which Widening Participation is understood are directly linked to governmental operations. Vocabularies of practice and research were built up around the governance directives rather than establishing Widening Participation as a field in its own right separate from the broader notion of access to education.

2.3 Macro-level understandings of Widening Participation

At a national or state level within England, there are two elements to Widening Participation. This is, what I would suggest to be for the purpose of this study,
the macro level of Widening Participation conceptualisation. The first element identified is that which is regulatory i.e. part of legislative and/or legal requirements. At a macro level this can be found within regulatory bodies such as OFFA or the QAA; or advisory bodies such as the HEA.

The second element is political rhetoric, where allusions to Widening Participation are made through political motivation. Widening Participation becomes a justification and a motivation for changes to the Higher Education sector. The most recent Policy for *Widening Participation in Higher Education* (Great Britain. Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012) requires all institutions to submit institutional policy that articulates ‘what each publicly funded college or university that provides higher education will do to attract, support and retain students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Universities and colleges must have an access agreement if they are charging above the basic rate of tuition fee’ (Ibid).

An institution must also enter into an agreement with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), the independent body whose function, according to their website homepage, is to ‘safeguard and promote fair access to higher education’ (OFFA, 2015). The successful impact of this policy is evidenced by the government in the rise in University applications from 18 year olds and in particular, there is a rise in applications made by ‘disadvantaged young people from England...to the highest ever (20.7%). This means that 18 year olds living in the most disadvantaged areas of England are nearly twice as likely to apply than they were 10 years ago’ (Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014). Affirmation of the link between Higher Education and the economy was given by Vince Cable, Business Secretary and recalls Friedman’s economic position from the 1960s, wherein the cost for Higher Education should be met by the individual student: ‘It’s clear that young people understand that investing in a degree is an investment for their future. New students do not pay fees upfront, there is more financial support for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and everyone will make lower loan repayments once they are in well paid jobs’ (Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014). Progression to Higher Education is portrayed as a ‘right’ under the auspices of a social justice and I suggest here it therefore becomes a ‘truth’. This ‘truth’ is what Simons (2002, p. 46) discusses as Foucault’s description ‘myths of humanization’ (sic). This
humanisation, Simons suggests ‘conceals its costs and presents its history as one of gradual liberation’ (Ibid).

The troublesome quality present in this comes from the mix of social justice and economic success. HEFCE do not perceive this as problematic and combine both in their aim for Widening Participation: ‘Our aim is to promote and provide the opportunity of successful participation in higher education to everyone who can benefit from it. This is vital for social justice and economic competitiveness’ (HEFCE, 2015). Participation is a mechanism for individuals to fulfil their potential at the same time as securing the future of a ‘Knowledge Economy’. This too is troublesome in that it is implied that there are those who would not benefit from a Higher Education. Who these people are and how they are identified is more difficult to ascertain. Thomas (2001) has also suggested that ‘higher education is not necessarily the pinnacle that all students are, or should, be aiming for; some forms of education are more suitable than others at various stages in students’ lives’ (p. 7). By focusing on Widening Participation to Higher Education as a social justice mechanism, a hierarchy exists in terms of types of post-compulsory education, as Thomas describes: ‘other forms of adult and post-compulsory education occupy[ing] more lowly positions’ (Ibid).

Most Widening Participation activity has focused on progression to Undergraduate programmes, but more recently HEFCE has been concerned with progression to Postgraduate programmes. The interest in this form of Widening Participation has led to the release of funds for pilot studies in exploring how to improve rates of progression between Undergraduate and Postgraduate study (HEFCE, 2013). The purpose of these pilot projects exploring progression to Postgraduate study is:

‘[T]o test options for finance and activity that will help HEFCE, Government and institutions develop strategies to ensure the continued success of postgraduate education, and particularly the taught element of the sector, from 2015. Part of such strategies will be to learn more about the barriers to accessing postgraduate taught programmes, recognising the importance of those programmes as a route into postgraduate research, and to develop projects to address those barriers’ (Ibid).

These pilot studies suggest the understanding of Widening Participation in a
Postgraduate context is less well defined than within the context of Undergraduate programmes. It also suggests different questions than those relating to Undergraduate progression. Is it possible, for example, to be a Widening Participation ‘subject’ if the individual has an Undergraduate degree? Have I, for example, become less ‘Working-Class’ because I obtained an Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Degree? Do I lose the characteristics identified in Widening Participation research of coming from a low socio-economic background to enable me to make the best transition because I have those two degrees? The assumption herein is Undergraduate learning prepares for Postgraduate study and at the same time readies an individual for the work place. HEFCE are attempting to build upon the research conducted on progression to Undergraduate programmes but there is again significantly lack the criticality regarding the notion of progression into Postgraduate programmes, and this I suggest is caused by the conceptualisation of Widening Participation.

The gap in interrogating the conceptual basis of Widening Participation is alluded to within the HEFCE commissioned review of Widening Participation activity by Gorard et al (2007). They suggested that ‘[A] more explicit understanding of widening participation is required. This is likely to include who is to be targeted, whose responsibility it is whether all institutions should play the same role, and whether it is national policies, institutions or individuals that must change’ (p. 125). This suggestion was, at least in part, motivated by the apparent lack of impact a £2billion investment on Widening Participation activities since 1997 had made on progression, with the number of entrants from lower social classes having fallen. (p. 4). Similarly, David (2010) suggested through the lens of Widening Participation that there was a need to question what Higher Education is and who or what does it serve.

It is possible to view much research examining Widening Participation as focused on impact (i.e. the improvement in rates of progression to Higher Education or understanding barriers to progression) and evaluation constructed to measure impact. In Gorard et al, 2007; David, 2010; and Vignoles and Crawford, 2010, there is a focus on more traditional direct progression from school to Higher Education and how policy, governance and interventional practices intersect to further demonstrate improved understanding in this area.
As such, these become dominant thematic trends within the research in this area.

2.4 Thematic trends within Widening Participation research: Policy and Governance

Once established as an activity within Higher Education, Widening Participation became a subject and a site of investigation to both enhance practice and better understand those targeted by practice. There are broadly two types of Widening Participation research within this topic: the first type of research examines empirical observations of progression through data and other statistical devices or policy documentation that then may or may not be used in conjunction with narrative data from participants themselves. This work also produces sub-topics of investigation: Admissions, Retention and Student Success and Fees and Debts.

2.4.1 Discourse of Policy and Governance

Policy and Governance of Widening Participation discourse highlights the role of National and Regional directives to rationalise and enhance the development of how Widening Participation should function. Here, the literature focuses on documenting activity and highlighting development of delivery that is aimed at improving participation rates from underrepresented demographics. The work of MacDonald and Stretta (2001) suggested a need to move away from a top down approach to Policy directives. Lewis (2002) follows this idea in taking a broad survey approach to Policy and Governance of Widening Participation. Lewis documented the expansion of Higher Education in the 1990s, including the “New” Labour government target of 50% of 18-30 having had some experience of Higher Education by 2010. Part of this review included how HEFCE had developed its policies and strategies to support the state intention of promoting an expansion of diversity within Higher Education and also reinforced a move to more localised development. Greenback (2006) would continue this type of survey by examining the ‘evolution’ of policy and specifically the involvement of stakeholders, particularly the absence of those
identified within the strategies as benefiting from Widening Participation in the development of such governmental targets.

Gorard et al. (2007) was commissioned by HEFCE to undertake a large-scale survey of Widening Participation activity. This activity was to understand more fully the barriers that exist to progression into Higher Education in order to make recommendations for policy and activity development. As it was commissioned by HEFCE it is arguable how impartial the report was intended to be. The review of literature responded to a significant amount of research conducted around the theme of barriers (social and economic) that impacted on progression into Higher Education. The conclusions of this review indicated that although significant amounts of financial support had been invested and a growing amount of research had been conducted, Widening Participation in policy and practice was still nebulous and quality and implementation varied considerably.

Powdthavee and Vignoles (2007) examined the notion of success and barriers to it within Higher Education by those from backgrounds underrepresented in Higher Education. Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman and Vignoles (2013, p. 454) would later examine large amounts of educational administrative data to conclude that HEIs cannot deliver interventional activity independently of other agencies such as Schools and Social Support. Accordingly, interventions should take place throughout the learning journey of an individual. The authors highlighted that:

‘the socio-economic difference in HE participation does not arise simply because lower SES [socio-economic status] pupils face the same choices at 18 years of age but choose not to go to university or are prevented from doing so. Instead, it comes about largely because lower SES pupils do not achieve as highly in secondary school as their more advantaged counterparts, confirming the general trend in the literature that socio-economic differences emerge relatively early in individuals’ lives’ (Ibid).

Here, the authors suggest that a systematic approach to interventional activity needed to be coordinated across agencies that have contact with young people, especially those that would not normally have the support mechanisms in place to promote progression (such as family support). What this suggests is a focus
on developing fundamental understanding of why generic groups of learners do not progress and an implicit assumption that progression is a necessity for the development of these groups.

Part of the discussion around progressions from a policy and governance perspective involved explorations into how Admissions practices prevented or promoted access to Higher Education. Seville and Tooley’s (1997, pp. 35-6) overview of a meritocratic approach to Higher Education, identifies a continuing ‘elite’ section of society that are somewhat synonymous with Higher Education. This elite is easily able to access Higher Education and gain the appropriate prior learning experience and credentials in order to progress. Seville and Tooley argued for a more flexible Higher Education that reduces the significance placed on aptitude requirements for entry. In particular, they suggested an inequality in the resourcing of those from different socio-economic backgrounds, even though there was an increasing state intervention process.

Discipline specific research would later evolve from the initial work in the 1990s. This would further explore how the admissions process varied in regards to the diversity of applicants and the variety of how programmes and disciplines recognise the impact on prior learning experiences. Similarly, the experience of the admissions process itself would also come under scrutiny. Examples of these types of investigations include Seyan, Greenhalgh, and Dorling, (2004) who examined admissions to Medical Schools using data of entrant ethnicity and socio-economic background. Moran (2008) examined the admission and selection process of Initial Teacher Training programmes through the frame of Widening Participation. These studies served to position admissions practices within a discipline specific context and to understand how observations made at a generic level may in practice be applied or challenged. These studies identified ways in which the disciplines were inherently disengaging with underrepresented demographics through their admissions process and supported the notion of early intervention practices. This would allow participants to become familiar with the requirements of the discipline in relation to the prior attainment. These studies did not focus, however, on the impact of diversifying cohorts through intervention activity.
Within the notion of broadening access through improving and revisiting admissions practices the introduction of tuition fees in the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 (Great Britain. Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998: Elizabeth II. Chapter 30, 1998) created a different perspective on this topic. Callender (2002) outlined the apparent contradiction between government targets to increase participation from underrepresented groups whilst also introducing tuition fees. It was thought that students from underrepresented demographics would be less likely to progress to a programme of Higher Education and this conflicted with the government attainment targets of participation. Leathwood and Hayton (2002) also identified the relationship between the introduction of tuition fees and promoting a notion of social mobility as a contradiction. Similarly, Thompson (2006) would continue to emphasise the contradictions between “New” Labour policy in the shape of the first increase of fees in 2004 and maintaining a target of 50% participation rates. The contradictions are founded on principles of a "free" education changing to emphasise the individual taking financial responsibility for their own educational improvement. Additionally, the focus of Thompson was on differentiating between governmental activity and learner reality of Higher Education including how tuition fees and diversification of learners could affect perception of the learning context.

Much of this research on admissions can be related to success and retention (and by association withdrawal from participation in Higher Education). These are predominant topics because admission and retention of students on programmes of Higher Education is considered a performance indicator of an institution’s success in attracting, admitting and appropriately supporting students from diverse backgrounds (Pugh, Coates and Adnett, 2005). Subsequently, what is presented within these accounts are strategy models or suggestions for policy at discipline, institutional or governmental level to ensure that students can navigate the admission process to succeed on their programme. This is aptly described by Brighouse (2010, pp. 288-9) who outlines the concept of an admissions process as ‘[u]niversities admit students who have done well in compulsory education; that is who have had the kind of home background that fits them well into compulsory education and students who have had good experiences within it’. The rapid growth of UK Higher
Education in the 1990s, continued with the Coalition government formed in 2010 and is driven, according to Brighouse (2010, p. 291) because ‘governments are under pressure from non-college educated voters who see Higher Education as a route to social mobility for their children, and from college-educated voters who see it as a means of social closure’. The drive then, for the changes in Higher Education could be seen as an attempt by a government to stay in power.

As Brighouse (2010, p. 292) observes however:

‘[T]here is a brief opportunity in one’s late teens or early twenties missing which makes it near impossible to advance beyond a certain level within the occupational structure; mass Higher Education confirms this rigidly, which is especially serious for those children whom school does not suit’.

This justifies to a certain extent the emphasis Widening Participation projects place on school-aged children. With this in mind, the position of Widening Participation as a process to increase numbers entering a production of those who can respond to the routine education becomes training for the mundane, reiterating the ‘docile bodies’ of Foucault (1977). The docile body is under the operation of a mode of control, in this case through educational and intervention activities that uses and improves the individual for the purpose of creating a socially useful contributor. Brighouse (2010, p. 291) highlights this as universities playing ‘the role that employers used to play in preparing students for work, and playing another role, of assuring social closure’.

Alongside the increasing debate surrounding admissions practices, the issue of retaining students once they had started studying emerged. The notion of student retention and success is directly linked to the Widening Participation agenda with non-traditional participants less likely to complete their programme of study or to underachieve within assessment practices. The work of Davis (2002) examined the relationships between racial diversity and correlative successes and failures of participants within Higher Education. These notions are explored in Thomas, 2002; Thomas and Quinn, 2003; and Yorke and Thomas, 2003 that made clear a growing understanding of relationships regarding prior attainment and educational experience as impacting on engagement with interventional activity and subsequent success in Higher
Education. Thomas and Quinn (2006) would later narrow the focus onto more specific intersectional understandings of the potential impact being a first generation entrant to Higher Education had on entry and subsequent success. The impact of research exploring student success would also intersect with another trend in research exploring learners and the impact Widening Participation on learning and teaching could and should have.

2.5 Thematic trends within Widening Participation research: Learner Voice and Impact on Learning and Teaching

The second thematic trend within Widening Participation research examined here explores an individual or a group of individuals' experience of education and the methodological use of personal narratives. These narratives could relate to prior or current educational experiences that are used to inform practices in developing pathways of progression to Higher Education. Importantly this type of research was focused on the voice of the target participants in order that researchers could learn about their experiences. These articulations of the experience of exclusion were a way to understand barriers to educational progression as perceived by those facing the barriers.

2.5.1 Discourse of Impact on Learner Experience and Learning and Teaching

Research by Archer and Hutchings (2000) investigated more explicit articulations of participants' constructions of Higher Education to understand why target subjects would be less likely to take up activities on outreach programmes. Working with groups of people that had either actively chosen to not participate in Higher Education or had not had the opportunity to progress and were classified as 'non-participant'. Archer and Hutchings examined the construction of a perceived value of Higher Education against economic and social risk held by those who were targeted by Widening Participation activities.

This field was expanded by the work of Burke (2002) who captured mature student narratives on access programmes and framed them within the discourse of Widening Participation. She would continue her work in developing the discourse around Widening Participation when she examined gender as an
intersecting factor on learner engagement and the notion of educational aspirations (Burke, 2006). Importantly the focus was on understanding the participants behind the statistics and the social policy.

Reay, Ball and David (2002) likewise contributed to this discourse by tracking and interrogating the progression and engagement of mature students on access programmes and the transition to Higher Education. Bowl (2003) conducted a project examining non-traditional entrants on an outreach programme in Birmingham in the early 2000s. These examples raised the issue of social class and representation within Higher Education and the voice of the participant and the researcher. They raised the issue of the researcher being external to the participants being observed. The researcher was in someway trying to understand something external to them. Reay, Ball and David (2002) and Bowl (2003) used quotes derived from their data collection in the titles to their work to highlight the distinction between the Policy orientated work that had so far dominated the field. The subtitle of Bowl’s work ‘They talk about people like us’ appropriately suggested the way in which participants on outreach and access programmes had been constructed within research literature and policy.

These narrative-driven titles would continue with Byrom, Thomson and Gates (2007) relating to school learners experience of interventional activity ‘My School Has Been Quite Pushy About the Oxbridge Thing’. The importance of these narrative titles signify the representation of participants within the research process and raising awareness of the impact of policy and practice on groups and individuals. To continue to counter the absence of representative voices of non-traditional learners, research in this area aimed to provide ways of interrogating, engaging and involving those learner voices within their design and practice. Baker and Comfort (2004) created a ‘tool kit’ of resources that suggested approaches to teacher development. These resources enabled practitioners to engage more systematically with learner voice and specifically raised the importance of learner voice in both teacher and curriculum development. Jones (2004) would contextualise the necessity of this type of resourcing within approaches to developing teaching with respect to inclusion.
Other topics for research within this discourse of impact on learning and teaching include that which examined curriculum and pedagogies of Higher Education within the context of Widening Participation. Warren (2002) anticipated the impact Widening Participation would have on equality discourse within pedagogical research and Williams, Turrell and Wall (2002) reported on how focusing on Learning Environments could promote more successful engagement by women learners. Ridley (2007) examined assessment outcomes as a specific area of curriculum development that could identify disadvantaged non-traditional participants, predominantly through the use of traditionally orientated assessment modes such as essays. Beaumont, O'Doherty and Shannon (2008) examined perceptions of ‘quality’ feedback and in particular highlighted the discrepancy between tutor perceptions of what was being provided (and for what purpose) and student’s perceptions of what were described as unfamiliar processes of practices of assessment. Preece and Godfrey (2004) explored strategies for developing academic literacy, which was an identified component for increasing success in Widening Participation students within a Business School.

Much of the literature here traverses tensions between identifying the most effective point of interventional activity. It questions whether the activity should occur at school (and at what point); prior to application to Higher Education; during a programme of Higher Education. This research identified experiences and skills that were barriers to success on programmes, practices of selection within admissions processes that disadvantaged applicants from under-represented backgrounds, and educational experiences that did not provide successful foundations for progression into Higher Education. This therefore highlights what Jones (2008) articulates as reforms needed to Higher Education itself in order to embrace and promote the inclusion of students drawn from more diverse backgrounds.

The general approaches explored within the literature presented so far functioned in developing an epistemological basis for the understanding Widening Participation as a site for inquiry and development. The general approach of all these pieces of research is built upon an assumption of the implicit right of improving progression to Higher Education. There is, however, alongside this body of work, a small set of works that question the ideological
Foundation of Widening Participation and the assumptions held therein.

2.6 Ideological examinations of Widening Participation and the nature of Widening Participation Research

The themes presented so far within this review functioned to establish a base for a research field in Widening Participation to Higher Education. A vastly smaller yet significant strand of Widening Participation research stands aside from the literature presented so far. This strand questions the approach to the critique of the rationale and political integrity of how Widening Participation has been governed, delivered and interrogated. Here, I present this sub-strand of the research field that is focused on understanding the ideological foundations of Widening Participation. It is within this strand that I place the work contained within this thesis.

2.6.1 Discourse of the Nature of Widening Participation Research

Ilon (1997) had presented a critique of the new Educational reports led by Dearing (1997) and Kennedy (1997) and identified a ‘dual agenda’. This was the premise that explicitly linked education with that of developing healthy market activity. Ilon suggested ‘[t]hey are neither inherently complementary nor contradictory... It is the assumption of complementary goals that is potentially destructive’ (1997, p. 5). This articulation clearly suggests an early indication of a relationship between the market model agenda of a neoliberal context and the emphasis on a paradigm of educational success linked to such a model of capitalism. This idea is missing from many narratives of Widening Participation research and suggests a different approach for research if this is adopted as a position for investigation. In particular, it suggests that understanding Widening Participation to Higher Education needs to be considered within a framework of market activity. Ilon identified that an assumption of complimentary ideological foundations was potentially significant for studies that did not engage with critique of these assumptions.

Popkewitz and Lindblat (2000) use a poststructuralist approach in analysing research exploring the ideological underpinnings and assumptions of the relations between policy development and governance of social inclusion and educational governance within the European Union. Although not specifically
citing Widening Participation to Higher Education, this piece of work highlights a conceptual gap. Importantly, they identify as necessary an examination of the those classified within equity discourse and contextualised within a knowledge discourse, This, for the authors, presents challenges in the potential development of interaction between educational governance and social inclusion. Popkewitz and Lindblat suggest that these challenges are conceptual in that equity stands to mean representation of individuals and knowledge as ‘systems of reason’ and at the time were not interrogated as interrelational. As such, they argue that ‘the conceptual relationship of governance and inclusion/exclusion was not explicitly explored in previous literature except tacitly in, for example, discussion of the relationship between governmental policies of labour markets and employment or educational access’ (p. 34). By questioning a lack of conceptualisation within the research field, they suggest ‘rethinking the conceptual ways in which we have organized research on governance and inclusion/exclusion... This is not an equity problem nor is it solely one of knowledge per se, but a relational question of fields of interaction’ (p. 36). Within this work it is possible to understand a separation of individuals and social interactions against a system of processes and practices linked to knowledge creation.

Minter (2006) returns to the work of Ilon (1997) to outline what he describes as four flaws in the ‘common theory’ of Widening Participation. These flaws are: 1. Strategies focus on single loop learning rather than a deep-rooted change of a system (educational, social, etc.) (pp. 253-4); 2. Blame is directed towards non-participants rather than inadequacies in what is offered as learning and an understanding of habitus on this (p. 254-5); 3. Individual’s trajectories influenced by habitus are not recognised in Widening Participation theories (p. 255-6); 4. The ignoring of the common internalising of feeling that learning is ‘just not for me’ (p. 256). While some of these ‘flaws’ may have been addressed through developments in intervention research and changes to the learning and teaching environments, these flaws still raise substantial questions for how Widening Participation is approached theoretically as a concept to be explored. In particular, Minter suggests that the motivation for a shift of focus by society on Widening Participation is a Foucauldian realisation of a ‘fictitious relation’, i.e. the relationship between learning, the market and individual emancipation
Unlike Mintor (2006), Kettley’s (2007) reiteration of conceptual barriers and false boundaries created within the research field focuses on a call for a greater holistic approach. His sociologically focused historical overview of how Widening Participation research had developed under the notion of Access to Higher Education through to contemporary studies located it as emerging from a body of work that was at the time 45 years old (p. 333). From Kettley’s perspective, a false binary between qualitative and quantitative research created a barrier itself in the development of research. In his recommendations for the future, he states: ‘The future of widening participation research requires the re-conceptualisation of the field and holistic research agendas’ (p. 343). Kettley focuses here on the thematic distinctions within empirical data collection (class, gender, context for example) described as ‘the underdeveloped concept of barrier’ (Ibid). His ultimate challenge, although directed at sociological activities, states:

‘There has been little effort to provide integrated theoretical explanations of the processes that produce, and occasionally transform, patterns of participation considering students’ aggregate lifestyles. The future of widening participation research does not reside in identifying gaps in the literature, nor in plugging these gaps by modifying existing approaches. Instead, the application of the sociological enterprise to the issue of widening participation needs to be challenged and empirical, holistic and mixed methods projects designed’ (p. 345).

The implication then is that it is not good enough to have representative voices on one side of the data and policy driven statistical analysis on the other. Instead, Kettley suggests that a new sociological approach needs to be adopted in order to understand this holistically. This is problematic in its seemingly universal approach to knowledge, but it does at least suggest, similarly to Gorard et al (2007), that the different approaches to research at this point were unsatisfactory.

One of the primary texts that had already began to question the ideological foundation for Widening Participation (Watts, 2006) uses Ricoeur’s notion of the golden rule of a call for justice and identifies a ‘norm of reciprocity’: ‘[It] implies a
social contract between equals because it is predicated upon the anticipation that whatever is given will be received in return. This, though, renders the exchange susceptible to misinterpretation and abuse so that the giving becomes conditional...’ (p. 309). Using this conceptual apparatus to critique the Widening Participation agenda as a practice of sacrifice and directly linked to the notion of economic success, Watts establishes the governmental conflation of social justice and economic development as a way of maintaining an injustice within the Higher Education sector. Watts’ conclusion suggests that ‘there will always be those who benefit from a utilitarian system, and here, within the context of higher education, there will be students from historically underrepresented groups who do benefit from the government’s widening participation agenda’ (p. 310). Watts aspires to create a just and pluralistic society and the use of Ricoeur's theories result in ‘recogising the value of other aspirations and other lifestyles that do not necessarily require participation in higher education’ (p. 311).

Within the work of Watts (2006) there is reference to a process that deconstructs the appearance of social justice through Widening Participation. Watts suggests that individuals are required to make a significant sacrifice in order to fulfill their destiny according to the utilitarian scheme. This notion is related to Minter’s (2006, p. 255) use of Alheit’s analysis (1999, p. 71 quoted in Minter, 2006, p. 255) on German Society and expanding educational systems:

‘Many of the upwardly mobile notice that they have left behind the milieu they stem from, but are not at all at home in their new social surroundings. They are made to feel, or notice intuitively, that a title does not guarantee the habitus that was classically associated with it. In many cases, those who have climbed the ladder feel socially out of place. They come to realise that distinction is something beyond mere titles’.

This raises a suggestion that the interrelations between educational attainment and social justice are not as conceptually secure when different conceptual lenses are in place. Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003) earlier linked similar potentially contradictory premises when they explored the psychological and sociological impact on working class female participants and the notion of being successful in education. To further this idea I shall now examine more closely a
more recent identification of a re-reading of Widening Participation discourse, in part as a preparation for establishing the methodology described in Chapter Three.

2.6.2 Re-reading of Widening Participation and making the link to neoliberalism

Burke (2012) presented the most radical analysis of Widening Participation discourse. Presenting the connection between Widening Participation and neoliberalism, Burke wrote 'the neoliberal framing of widening participation policy, and indeed education policy more generally, has worked to shift attention away from concerns with social justice to a focus on employability, skills enhancement, entrepreneurialism and economic competitiveness, as well as to produce a realm of self-disciplining technologies' (p. 177). Burke did this by placing Widening Participation as a project of social justice ‘by virtue of its underpinning aim’ (Ibid).

By positioning Widening Participation as that which has been impacted negatively by neoliberalism, Burke (2012) attempts to redraw the focus of what it is to be a Widening Participation subject, someone whose identity, according to much Widening Participation policy, is created through notions of ‘finding yourself’ (p. 63) and which ‘rely on processes of recognition – the ‘talented’ person can only become this kind of person through being recognized by others as ‘talented’ (Ibid). Burke suggests that Widening Participation ‘has become part of a wider political project of neoliberal globalization, with higher education strongly associated with economic imperatives, and teaching, learning and assessment often forming a part of disciplinary and regulatory technologies...’ (pp. 192-3). In this matter, the stated aim of the text to ‘disrupt the privileging of certain forms of knowledge, practice and subjectivity and the misrecognition of ‘Others” (p. 193) leaves some questions left unexplored, which inform the research questions examined within my work here.

The first of these key questions relates to the placing of Widening Participation as an opposition to neoliberalism as the most effective way of critically exploring either ideological position. It has been suggested here that a separation may conceal other aspects of understanding and in particular ideological foundations of the importance of Widening Participation. The second question is how
Widening Participation can be examined within the framework of the discourse surrounding the commodification of Higher Education in England. Burke seems to imply that the social justice that underpins Widening Participation has been somehow diluted by the neoliberal developments in Higher Education. However, if this is flipped to suggest that Widening Participation has become the expression of the neoliberal form of social justice then other ways of understanding the conceptual foundation of Widening Participation are possible.

It is contended here that research exploring access to Higher Education, broadly identified throughout this study as Widening Participation has itself been politicised to promote an appropriated form of social justice through a lack of clear interrogations of underlying critical developments in Higher Education as a whole. Extending and following the work of Burke (2012) critical frameworks have been chosen in order to problematise the assumptions of the ideological foundation of Widening Participation. This thesis belongs to a discourse that repositions Widening Participation as a political site. The commonality between this thesis and the work of Burke’s lies in the identification of the need to rethink Widening Participation as a political agenda. In particular, the hegemonic beliefs about the conceptualisation and construction of Widening Participation are challenged. Whereas Burke’s poststructuralist criticality concludes with a promotion of ‘participatory pedagogies’ (p. 185) that follow from the work of Friere, here, it is argued that the use of the different critiques of neoliberalism itself reveal a complex set of social relationships. These relationships are normally disguised by other forms of critical complexity that function according to the normative and dominant discourse of social justice. The approaches to researching Widening Participation as a project of social justice invoke notions of education as a ‘right’ alongside issues of equality in accessing all levels of education. This reiterates what Burke (2012, p. 66) identifies when suggesting ‘identity and subjectivity are central then in understanding the complex forms of exclusion and inequality that play out in educational contexts and the ways some people are not recognized as being worthy of or having the right to higher educational access and participation’.

Burke (2012) offers an initial repositioning of the relationship between neoliberalism, Higher Education and Widening Participation through a review of
policy and practice. The importance of this text in particular is the clear link between a critique of neoliberal ideological impact on Higher Education and Widening Participation. There is also an invocation of social justice to promote Widening Participation as an assumed ‘good’. The positioning of social justice as an appropriation within neoliberal ideology enables this study to critically understand how Widening Participation may also be understood within neoliberal development models. Burke (p. 196) suggests that within ‘transformatory approaches to widening participation...is one that allows resistance to the seductions of rationalist, linear, standardizing, homogenizing, normalizing, regulatory, colonizing, exclusive and totalitarian regimes of knowing and being known’. Burke’s utopia is however, problematic in that access to Higher Education is positioned as a project of social justice and ‘is ultimately about deeply valuing and appreciating the significant contribution of higher education to social justice and the public good, to the complex processes of knowledge construction and to the on-going development of different social groups...’ (Ibid). Here, the ‘goodness’ of Higher Education is the basis for the claim of rethinking Widening Participation. Although Burke’s study critiques this to some extent, it is problematic to create a casual relationship between Widening Participation, Higher Education and Social Justice without examining it through a variety of different perspectives to see how it appears from those differing narratives to be suggested, explored and tested. Most importantly they allow for a reassessment of aspects of Higher Education examined through a critique of Widening Participation that has not been considered before.

2.7 Research Aims of this study

The literature explored here appraised the field of Widening Participation research that emerged from 1992 onwards. The research initially focused on policy impact and interrogation of policy development. Likewise the research that focused more on participant voice did so to capture the living narratives of those being targeted by the policies. How the concept of Widening Participation was formulated and what it means conceptually is less rigorously tested. Within the smaller field that examines from a more critical and theoretical position, it is evident that there is a significant gap with regard to philosophical understanding of Widening Participation. In particular, the political underpinnings of Widening
Participation are generally assumed to be for a greater good and only a few commentators (such as Watts 2006) have suggested that applying theoretical lenses to the study of Widening Participation could drastically alter how it is perceived, namely as a mechanism of a utilitarian state. Therefore, to attempt to engage with this gap, this study presents its core research aims that will be addressed throughout the remaining chapters.

These research aims are:

I. To analyse the conceptual positioning of Widening Participation in its relationship with neoliberalism.
II. To analyse theories of a commodified Higher Education sector.
III. To analyse the conceptual role and implications of Widening Participation in relation to Higher Education practices.
IV. To create a conceptual framework from the combination of analyses created in order to make recommendations about future Widening Participation Activity within Higher Education.

**Research Aim I:** The Literature examined here suggested that understanding Widening Participation as a concept has not sufficiently taken place outside of policy directives. In addition, the policy directives that define what Widening Participation is and who it targets are politically located. This political location could be identified as a neoliberal form of late capitalism. Burke (2012) has suggested a relationship between the neoliberal context and Widening Participation. Burke, however, contends the political context has appropriated the Widening Participation agenda. The first aim of this study is to interrogate Widening Participation as a potential construction of neoliberalism. This suggests an alternative way of perceiving Widening Participation as part of a neoliberal development of Higher Education.

**Research Aim II:** Neoliberalism is a form of capitalism and to understand the impact of neoliberalism on Higher Education more generally it is necessary to engage with the discourse relating to the commodification of Higher Education. This market model of Higher Education is understood to be a direct impact of neoliberalism and understanding the role of Widening Participation within this
context could open other ways of understanding both the commodified Higher Education sector and Widening Participation.

**Research Aim III:** The previous two aims form a way of understanding theoretical positions but also have a possibility for understanding embedded practices. By interrogating the conceptual role of Widening Participation in relation to Higher Education practices and in particular how learners and educators interact within the learning context.

**Research Aim IV:** In order to make sense of the theoretical positions and in particular the intersections of different analyses, bringing them together to form a coherent (albeit complex) framework enables the making of recommendations about the future of Widening Participation activity within Higher Education.

To establish how these research aims will be used, Chapter Three will now establish the approach to the investigation. In particular, it will introduce the different critical lenses and how they will be used to critique the impact of the themes that emerged from this Literature Review.
Chapter Three: Methodology

3. Introduction

The research conducted here is a theoretical examination of the relationship between Widening Participation to Higher Education and neoliberalism. It uses a range of concepts as lenses through which to explore and critique Widening Participation and create a framework for analysis. The research was never intended to simply refute the positions of either Widening Participation practices or the construction of neoliberal economic ideology. Instead the research employs a plurality of critical lenses to construct a conceptual analysis of the relationship between Widening Participation and the ideology of neoliberalism and subsequently on Higher Education practices. The approach in constructing a theoretical framework through which I analyse these relationships follows from Foucault’s (1980) assessment of the discourse surrounding ideology. Foucault suggests that ideology critique ‘always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth’ (p. 118). What is meant, then, is there is no process of liberating truth from a dominating lie; it is not about unmasking the lie and revealing the truth. Following Foucault this project should not aspire to replicate truth utterance but contemplate ‘the establishment of domains, or “regimes of truth”, in which the practice of true and false can be made at once ordered and pertinent’. (p. 9). In other words, I do not contend that through the unveiling of Widening Participation as a mechanism of neoliberal economic and political practices, that a truth will be exposed in opposition to the ‘lie’ of neoliberalism. Neither should it be expected that this study is attempting to position Widening Participation as a liberal project that has been appropriated by neoliberal ideological practices as this would serve to reinforce an ideological binary.

To be aware of ideological binaries within this analysis is to acknowledge what within Foucauldian perspective is ‘normalizing judgement [that] is appropriate to the fields of education, health and production’ (Simons, 2002, p. 45). Writing about Foucault’s work on punishment, Simons describes this as being little more than ‘an extension of the ‘right’ to supervise, train, correct and improve, because ‘right’ has become a function of the true. What was a moral rule is
merged into a scientific rule, and a normative judgement in terms of right is right because it correctly assesses conformity to, or divergence from the norm' (Ibid). Widening Participation and Higher Education and in particular the commodification of the latter are considered here as a normalising practice within a neoliberal context. In the same way that Foucault discusses the separation of the mentally ill from criminals in prisons as representing an appearance of social evolution that becomes one of these myths of humanisation, so too it is possible to examine Widening Participation as one of those ‘discursive arrangements and power/knowledge shifts’ (Ibid) that replaces progression.

Instead of continually constructing binary positions, utilising a Foucauldian approach challenges us to engage with exposing power dynamics. In this case the power dynamics are examined between Higher Education and Widening Participation. This allows for an understanding of the power discourse contained within their relationship and this is connected to the broader neoliberal context. Importantly, it is not the purpose of this study to suggest a utopian model of Widening Participation i.e. when this ideal Widening Participation occurs no power is exerted on any individual and participants who partake are able to signify their own class journey through each mechanism. Instead, activities are based on ethics that subvert the act of domination that is covertly disguised as social justice.

The value of a poststructuralist approach is the challenge to binary thinking that supports hierarchy or ‘economy of value' (Peters and Burbules, 2004, p. 19). Applied here, it is used to examine hierarchical relationships between and within Widening Participation, Higher Education and neoliberalism. It is when theories that reject binary constructions are used to examine commonly held assumptions that alternative ways of seeing can be identified. Both Giroux (2004) and Hill and Kumar (2009) have explored the relationship between neoliberalism, Higher Education, social justice and democracy. They argue that this relationship is a mechanism of social control (inhibiting justice and democracy) and conversely a mechanism for a particular type of social justice.

This approach responds to what Burke (2012) says regarding the field of Widening Participation: ‘policy and practice is implicated in the dual process of
submission and mastery in the formation and recognition of the Widening Participation subject. Those recognized as ‘WP students’, as 'having potential' and as disadvantaged’...are subjected to the ‘disciplinary gaze’ of [Widening Participation] discourse’ (p. 57). A range of approaches are used within this study to provoke and challenge the understanding of the relationship between Widening Participation and Higher Education as a social construction, a moral imperative and a political tool. In particular, the purpose of this is to disrupt the ‘disciplinary gaze’ that Burke has suggested within the Widening Participation discourse and to identify how Widening Participation and Higher Education are used to regularise learning pathways understanding an assumed ‘right' and ‘good' and a neoliberal form of social justice.

3.1 Conducting the Research process

Thomas (2007) describes the dominance of theory in explaining practice within educational research as the Humean application of verification leading to a 'taken-for-granted assumption in education that the pursuance of theory ultimately confers improvements on practice...educational theory has nearly always led educational practice into wild goose chases and cul-de-sacs' (Thomas, 2007, p. 3). This articulates how I started to feel unsatisfied with the research I was engaging with when I began examining the field of Widening Participation. What emerged was my awareness of theories relating to the practice of Widening Participation, which were intended to improve practices in delivering Widening Participation activity and improving students' experience of learning and, additionally, to develop ways of ensuring students' success once they entered Higher Education that were embedded within a premise that it was a morally and socially important activity. What was also emerging for me was that the moral and social imperative was not being questioned in the way that the practice itself was being interrogated.

The ontological questioning that I then started to engage with focused much more on how I understood the purpose of Higher Education and how Widening Participation interacted with this purpose. Once I started down this path I started to question the nature of the student and the role of the teacher in relation to this previous questions.
I have always held the axiological view that Higher Education should be accessible to all and the cost of providing a Higher Education should be met by the state. The emancipatory potential of engaging with Higher Education has benefits for the individual and for society more generally is something I believe in, but the utilisation of emancipation in a transactional or instrumental manner contradicts this. The purpose of Higher Education, in my opinion, is to provide places for intellectual and creative engagement with knowledge and spaces to generate new ways of understanding the world around us. The role of the student is to have an interest in engaging with knowledge that had previously been created and to be part of the future development of knowledge. A teacher's role in this is to be part of both the space and place through their own interest in intellectual pursuits and also the role students can have in helping form new ways of seeing, doing, and understanding. For me, these positions have always been relatively simple constructions. However, as I have understood more about the political context within which Higher Education has functioned, I began to see how my ontological orientation had been manipulated to fulfil ideological requirements that I had not been fully aware of previously. This became more obvious as I understood more the idea of neoliberalism and how pervasive it was in contemporary educational contexts.

Given that I started to reject the theoretical constructions of the Widening Participation research I was exploring, it may appear odd that I then continued to develop a fully theoretical response in this thesis. This is in someway a result of having realised my dissatisfaction with the field through completing the first stage of the EdD. I could have withdrawn my candidature at this stage and resumed a PhD, where a theoretical thesis would not have been so unusual. I felt however, that the emerging need to establish my conceptual understanding of the field was directly related to my professional practice as an educator teaching theories of music and also closely linked to my theoretical positioning within the field of music.

This thesis uses critical theory as methodology because of the way in which this interrogates assumptions, particularly political ones that are embedded within social structures. My interest in emancipation, power and politics and how these
interact with Higher Education are naturally aligned with the critical paradigm and I recognise my own values in this as impacting on the way in which I have designed and conducted this research. One of the criticisms of critical methodology is an embedded elitism relating to the notion of emancipation. Mack (2010) suggests:

'[b]y assuming that everyone needs to be emancipated, critical theorists assume that they have been emancipated and therefore are better equipped to analyze society and transform it than someone else. Furthermore there is a lack of evidence that illustrates what happens when you become emancipated and gain a critical consciousness' (p. 10).

My own emancipation (whether through my initial Higher Education or through my research as an EdD candidate) is not assumed to put me in a position that is 'better' than those who have not gone through the educational system. Indeed one of my frustrations with Widening Participation came from my belief that activities should not be built around the expectation that a good Widening Participation activity should result in progression to Higher Education. Instead I felt that Higher Education could be a place that provides a space for experiences hosted within the Higher Education framework more as a community engagement agenda rather than a progression agenda. I also recognise that my own criticism of Widening Participation and neoliberalism leads to a similar criticism that is sometimes levelled at critical methodology: 'there is a lack of evidence that illustrates what happens when you become emancipated and gain a critical consciousness. Is there any evidence that shows that once someone attains a critical consciousness he/she stops reproducing inequalities that subtly oppress people?' (Mack, 2010, p. 9). By this, it is meant that emancipation is understood to be desirable in order to further a cause of social justice and to limit oppression over others. However, this ontology itself is open for critique and appears at various stages of this thesis. In particular, this is explored as how Higher Education is positioned within neoliberal ideology to be the way by which a greater proportion of society can become successful participants in the 'Knowledge Economy' and the role of Widening Participation plays in promoting this position.
The idea of emancipation through the application of critical theory within educational research is usually intended as a 'first step needed in the transformative process in which a lesson and skill is enacted and practiced, otherwise known as a "praxis"' (Mack, 2010, p. 10). Praxis is understood to 'lead to social transformation in the classroom and in the collective societal level' (Ibid). This thesis does not test out the application of the conceptual framework and remains theoretical partly because of the complexity of the framework being established. It became more important to fully interrogate the application of the theories to the concept of Widening Participation than to cut that aspect short in order to falsely construct a practical application as part of the design without a complete conceptual framework. I was also concerned with what Thomas (2007) had described where a theory is applied in practice as an assumed result of the research process or how the intention is always leading to improve practice through theoretical alignment.

The research process transformed during the initial data collection from the intention to design a piece of Action Research around a specific activity I was conducting, to engaging with a critical debate on the relationship between Widening Participation, a commodified Higher Education sector and neoliberalism. As I began to identify my dissatisfaction with the critical basis of analysis within the research literature and the growing understanding of the gap in the literature that confronted this, it became important to me to ensure that I was examining something with integrity rather than staying with an idea because that is what I had initially designed. In addition, my professional practice began to alter precisely because of my critical engagement with the subject area and what is presented here is the fundamental framework for my research practices and how I engage with the learning and teaching community within Higher Education.

The research process followed a number of steps to enable the logical development of a research topic. I had identified the model for developing the research design during Stage One of the EdD. The model set out a research journey by Mackensie and Knipe (2006) enables the potential for different paradigmatic approaches.
Step One: Identifying a broad notion of the research topic had been predetermined by previous work on the EdD and was my reason for joining the programme in the first place. The topic was Widening Participation to Higher Education. At this stage the work was to focus on a Music-based Widening Participation activity with a view to developing the approach to design and implementation.

Step Two: The area of investigation related to how Widening Participation interventions in Music could be further contributing to an oppressive model of activity rather than acting in an emancipatory way and what could be done in changing the design to avoid or confront this.

Step Three: In order to specifically address the approach to be taken, I worked on identifying a mixed method of philosophical and critical theory that would enable text based analysis leading to a piece of Action Research.

Step Four: The Literature Review was initially focused on identifying either subject specific Widening Participation activities or Action Research. This, however, enabled me to identify a mismatch between my intended approach of constructing a piece of Action Research and my critical readings of the texts I was researching. The research problem then became defined in relation to neoliberalism, which was a pervading theme in my reading around Higher Education more generally, and in particular that of the commodified Higher Education sector. This then led onto the further refinement of the research problem that became about analysing the relationship between Widening Participation and neoliberalism.

Strategy of the Literature Review:
To understand the method of literature collation, and subsequent inclusion/rejection criteria for the data analysis, here I present the strategy of searching for data that developed over the course of the research. The search initially focused on a broad collation of literature that was continually checked throughout the research process for updated lists. This search focused on the British Education Index and JSTOR as the major sites of exploration. On the British Education Index the key words WIDENING PARTICIPATION were used
to begin a broad collation of literature, which returned 555 results. It should be noted that this literature search focused on the usage of the term Widening Participation rather than the field of Access to Higher Education. This was deliberate to ensure that the focus of the search matched the specific focus of the conceptual investigation. Focusing the search terms in order remove utilisation of the search term unrelated to education processes, practices or policies. The search term was then refined to WIDENING PARTICIPATION TO HIGHER EDUCATION within the index searches returned only 97 results within the time frame of 1992-2014 (the most recent updated search) and had been captured within the previous searches. The broader search return was used as a starting point for categorisation, detailed below. Limiting data according to geography was also considered in order to focus the study in relation to my own context and practice. Therefore, data was initially sorted according to its UK or International orientation.

Additionally, I also conducted Google-based searches using the key words WIDENING PARTICIPATION TO HIGHER EDUCATION to obtain articles and book references missed through Index searching. This approach enabled the identification of resources produced by Universities and other Higher Education organisations such as the Higher Education Academy and HEFCE that are referenced within this study. Further key words were used to identify speeches given by politicians/newspaper articles and other types of non-scholarly text. These were 'Progression to Higher Education'; and/or 'Aspiration'; and/or 'Social Justice'. These key words were also used to identify non-scholarly data that would be used to demonstrate a neoliberalising of political speech regarding education more broadly (such as Gove) and the way in which Higher Education had been impacted by a neoliberalisation through its commodification (such as Facebook adverts and blogs). These latter entries formed a different data set that was used to exemplify a neoliberalisation of the educational paradigm rather than research relating to Widening Participation.

As the search progressed it became apparent that there was a disproportionate amount of broader thematic work conducted than discipline specific work in this area. I conducted subject specific searches relating to my own field of specialism (Performing Arts; Music; Dance; Drama) to ensure that this was a correct observation. There was limited discipline specific literature found here
and any found predominantly related to pre-16 education intervention activity and was not specifically regarding progression into these disciplines within Higher Education so was rejected as being irrelevant for this study. This may be a useful post-thesis exercise for me to return to capture the discipline-focused literature within the performing arts field, as this is another gap within the field (and identified within Discussion Chapter Seven).

Applying these criteria enabled me to establish a chronological understanding of the development of the field. In the ten years following the first entry of relevant results referencing Widening Participation (1992-2002) 89 articles appears on the British Education Index. The following ten years (2003-2013) produced 423 results. In 2014 (the most recent updated search) there were 43 results. Generalising this, it is possible to suggest that the research field of Widening Participation was firmly established after 2002. Therefore the analysis of thematic development within this field will focus on the time period 2002-2014.

The final inclusion Criteria in the refinement of Widening Participation data for this study were as follows:

1. The data needed to be focused on Widening Participation to Higher Education within UK and specifically England, therefore Widening Participation within other geographical contexts was not included;

2. The document may focus on activity not directly delivered within an Higher Education context (i.e. work in schools or in adult or community education such as Bowl, 2002) but should make links to progression into Higher Education (as Bowl's project does, making links to progression to Higher Education and contextualised within Widening Participation discourse);

3. The key words Widening Participation to Higher Education must appear within the text for scholarly texts;

4. Key words for popular articles or speeches should include either Widening Participation to Higher Education and/or Raising aspirations and/or social justice.
The final 'Widening Participation' data set included 80 individual entries that met the inclusion criteria above, and is detailed in Appendix One. The data set included the following different types of document and each was coded accordingly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data type</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Number of entries</th>
<th>Examples from the data set</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy and White Papers</td>
<td>WPP</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports</td>
<td>WPR</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>HEFCE. (1994); Foundation Degree Taskforce (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal and other Articles</td>
<td>WPJA</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Callender, C. (2002); Swain, H. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly Books</td>
<td>WPSB</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Burke, P. J. (2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>WPST</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>HEFCE. (2012b); HESA. (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>WPSP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>James, R. (2007); Osborne, G. (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government or official body news</td>
<td>WPAGN</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources and website info</td>
<td>WPRE</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Singh, G. (2012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An additional data set was created through the use of materials that reflected critique of the marketisation or commodification of Higher Education or Education more broadly. This data set was used to extend observations made through the Widening Participation literature. This set comprised of 34 entries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data type</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Number of entries</th>
<th>Examples from the data set</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly Books</td>
<td>HESB</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Rolfe, G. (2013) <em>The University in Dissent</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports; Resources; Speeches and website info</td>
<td>RRSW</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Office for National Statistics. (2013) Full Report - Graduates in the UK Labour Market 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Step Five and Six:** The determining of data types focused on identifying differentiated text based analysis. The data was derived from: Reports, Policy Documents, Journal Articles, Scholarly Books, and Statistical Data. The data collection method was through document analysis. Because of the amount of data available I focused on Widening Participation to Higher Education in the UK, specifically focusing on England because of the devolved responsibilities.
for Higher Education in Scotland. This also reflected the context within which I was working. The focus on the term Widening Participation rather than searching for Access to Higher Education data helped to draw a boundary in data collection as it enabled a timeframe to be put in place with a starting point of 1992. The data set is employed significantly within the Chapter Two Literature Review, and the perceived gaps and themes are re-presented within lenses chapters. This is in preference to presenting specific analysis of particular texts. Chapters Four-Six are focused on embedding a critique of the concept of Widening Participation identified within the data set used in Chapter Two within the discussions of Neoliberalism and a commodified Higher Education. Additional to the Widening Participation data set, further documents and resources were utilised to exemplify the apparent neoliberalising of Higher Education. These included literature that was specifically focused on examining this as a commodified or marketised Higher Education (such as Bailey and Freedman, 2011); social media activity (such as the #Markmywork campaign and a blog article response and a Facebook advert from a law firm specialising in representing student complaints); speeches from politicians such as Michael Gove, who employ similar language as found within the Widening Participation discourse. This range of material was used to contextualise the Widening Participation data set both within wider educational discussions (considering that Widening Participation can function within pre-Higher Education contexts such as schools and community and adult learning centres). The social media examples highlighting #Markmywork were used to examine the subordinate position of the HE teacher within this political paradigm, similar in some ways to the way in which teachers in other contexts have been positioned. It was also used to highlight particular points of application of the three critical lenses in order to examine the broader impact of Widening Participation as a neoliberal construct.

**Step Seven:** Within this model of research design and as literature collation and analysis was the significant way in which data was collected there were many different literature searches conducted throughout the duration of the research as detailed in Steps Four-Six above.

**Step Eight:** As this was a theoretical EdD thesis, no ethics approval was
required as the research design did not require participants’ involvement. As there were no individuals involved no harm to any individual was possible. However the research was conducted within the framework of the BERA Code of Ethics (BERA, 2011).

**Step Nine:** The data was collected and stored locally. A database was created so I was able to cross-reference and return to sources when necessary.

**Step Ten:** The engagement with poststructuralist theory is in many ways generated from my own educational experiences at Undergraduate and Postgraduate where I engaged predominantly with poststructuralist theories of music. The term poststructuralism itself is problematic as it is contested and rejected by both those who are described as such and those who are not (Peters and Burbules, 2004, pp. 17-18). Importantly, Poststructuralist educational research does not utilise a set of methods (Peters and Burbules 2004, p. 56) but instead offers ways of viewing that allow the exposing of assumptions to come to the fore. Assumptions here are identified and then translated through the framework.

Researching Widening Participation by utilising methods already habitualised within this field could have produced replications of the same power dynamics already functioning. In particular, this approach to developing a complex framework enabled me to engage with the idea of ‘entertaining different explanations is a way of keeping an open mind’ (Dey, 1993, p. 229 and later reiterated in Dey, 2003, p. 239). This Theoretical Pluralism, a multi-paradigmatic approach to research, is what Thornberg (2012, p. 252) describes as the way a researcher can initiate ‘a critical, creative and sensitive conversation between different and even conflicting theoretical perspectives to explore and interpret data... the researcher is not restricted to theoretical orthodoxy but is prone to modify or elaborate extant concepts if he or she finds the need to do so in order to achieve a better fit and workability’.

The first round of data analysis was conducted using the critical framework of Commodity Fetishism (Marx, 1990). This was the first critical lens to be put in place and had derived from my initial reading around neoliberalism and the
types of critical apparatus used to analyse its ideology. This led to a resonance with my earlier reading of Rancière (1993) and his notion of Stultification. I then interrogated the data from that particular position. The final lens to be put in place as part of this theory construction approach was the theory of Educational Fundamentalism (Alvesson 2013), which came from a book that had appeared in a new literature search conducted two years into the research process.

**Step Eleven:** The writing up of findings and developing a discussion of those findings has taken place over a two-year period and literature searches were conducted periodically.

The limitations that the research design necessarily produces are focused around paradigmatic concerns. The first is that it would be possible to miss the link with practices of Widening Participation. Secondly, my professional role changing from Lecturer in Music to an Educational Developer means that the use of this framework needs a different consideration for implications on my own practice.

The lack of conceptual frameworks within the literature I analysed was both an opportunity and a limitation. Instead of being able to fit within one field of Widening Participation research I have had to construct a philosophy of Widening Participation.

One of the boundaries the research design necessitated because of the size of study was a geographical focus on the UK and specifically English Higher Education. This means that neoliberalism, which is a global political framework being examined within a very particular social-political construction of Higher Education that is contained with the timeframe of 1992-present day. This timeframe relates to the scope of literature specifically examining Widening Participation to Higher Education. This focuses the study, but could also have resulted in missed examples or practices that refuted my thesis.

**3.2 Introducing the critical lenses**

This study has assumed that Widening Participation is a complex concept that has not been adequately examined from a theoretical position to develop practices that are alert to hidden power dynamics. To demonstrate the
complexity of Widening Participation itself and its interaction with the neoliberal context, critical lenses have been employed to disturb the critical apparatus that Widening Participation uses. This troubles assumptions built around notions of accepted social 'good'. These lenses are Fetishism of the Commodity (Marx, 1990), Educational Fundamentalism (Alvesson, 2013) and Stultification (Rancière, 1993) and each lens is explored in turn. Utilising each lens to describe and accumulate understandings of Widening Participation, the study is able to suggest ways in which it conceptually functions within the commodification of Higher Education.

It is contended here that research exploring access to Higher Education, broadly identified throughout this study as Widening Participation has itself been politicised to promote a form of social justice through a lack of clear interrogations of underlying critical developments in Higher Education as a whole. Extending and following the work of Burke (2012) and through the creation of a complex critical framework, this work belongs to a discourse that repositions Widening Participation as a political site. Whereas Burke's poststructuralist criticality concludes with a promotion of 'participatory pedagogies' (p.185) that follow from the work of Friere, here I argue that the use of the different critiques of neoliberalism itself reveal a complex set of social relationships that are disguised by other forms of critical engagement. The hegemonic beliefs about the conceptualisation and construction of Widening Participation are challenged here. By positioning this analysis within a Neo-Marxist analysis of neoliberalism and extending this through educational critique of Alvesson and Rancière, these social relationships appear as fetishised commodities (Marx, 1990) within neoliberal development models. Widening Participation then, is not a mechanism that has been appropriated by neoliberal ideology, but utilised to develop the Knowledge Economy.

It is further suggested that through fuller engagement with the current discourse about the purpose of Higher Education and its apparent commodification, Widening Participation can be explored in relation to developing the Market Model of Higher Education. This is intended to create an account that challenges Widening Participation practices that promote fetishised values associated with and imposed upon Higher Education.
3.2.1 Background to Commodity Fetishism

The fetish of the commodity is described by Marx (1990) as ‘the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities...this fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them’ (p. 165). This use of the "fetish" predates Freud's psychoanalytic investigations and is very much rooted in the concept of labour and a critique of capitalism. The labour involved in the production of the commodity is contained within the commodity itself when exchanged for something else. The fetish therefore, occurs when the labour involved in producing the commodity itself is ignored, misunderstood or under-valued in relation to the resultant product. In particular, the social relations between people are replaced as social relations between things.

Rubin (2007, p. 5-6) describes Marx’s notion of Commodity Fetishism as the integral element of his economic system and that human relations ‘are veiled by relations between things...Marx having seen human relations underneath relations between things, revealing the illusion in human consciousness which originated in the commodity economy’. Rubin describes social interactions represented within the creation of an object and highlights the symbolic system created through exchange-value. If, in a neoliberal paradigm of political endeavour, it is possible to assert that Higher Education is a commodity to be purchased then it is also possible to explore what Rubin describes as characteristics assigned to "things" ‘which have their source in the social relations among people in the process of production’ (Ibid). What Rubin is describing here can be used to explore more fully the idea of the commodity fetishisation of Higher Education.

The commodification of Higher Education as an aspect of neoliberal ideology has been interrogated in many examinations of the contemporary state of Higher Education. This commodification is understood as the result of a neoliberal fetishisation of how the site for Higher Education creates knowledge. The relationship, however, between Widening Participation and neoliberalism has not been sufficiently examined. Therefore an understanding of how the fetishisation of Higher Education relates to Widening Participation could be
beneficial for future Widening Participation practices, especially those that question what Burke (2012) described as the ‘disciplinary gaze’.

Widening Participation is inextricably linked as a concept to the understanding of Higher Education as a sector. Much research, however, focuses on a linear development of practices – the formulation of pathways into Higher Education and the impact of Widening Participation practices on Higher Education Pedagogical practices. Osborne (2003) and McCaig (2011) have linked the notion of ‘widening’ with ‘increasing’ participation within Higher Education. It is this expansion that many have positioned as a mechanism in the neoliberal promotion and control of the Knowledge Economy through a commodification of Higher Education. The commodification is the establishment of a Market Model based Higher Education sector has been linked directly to neoliberal ideology (Hill and Kumar, 2009, Docherty, 2011; Furedi, 2011; Holmwood, 2011).

The emerging literature outlining a defence for a Public Higher Education from this marketisation (see, for example, Bailey and Freedman, 2011) has appeared over the past 10 years. The more frequent use of commodity-based language used to describe students, what they are learning and Higher Education in general has became more explicitly critiqued. A recent example of this commodity-based language is taken from a speech delivered by David Willetts, former Minister for Universities and Science, at the International HE Forum 2014. He reportedly described Chinese students entering UK HE as one of the UK’s biggest exports to China, second only to cars (Anon, 2014).

The expansion of Higher Education has been created through a variety of different processes. These include increasing the sites that deliver programmes of Higher Education to include commercial organisations and Further Education colleges, many of which offer different entry requirements and thus including students that may not fulfil traditional prior educational attainment (see, for example, Bowl, 2002). In addition, the number of places available to study on undergraduate programmes has increased and will grow further with the removal on the cap on numbers announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Autumn Budget of 2013 statement (Great Britain. HM Treasury, 2013). The link between expansion and Widening Participation to Higher Education is often made in political rhetoric as a form of social justice whilst at the same time
made by critics as a cause of the massification of the sector.

The relationship between Widening Participation, Higher Education and neoliberalism could be understood as:

a. Widening Participation that became commodified through the commodification of Higher Education;

Or,

b. Widening Participation that performed as a commodifying mechanism within the context of neoliberal social justice;

These positions are explored from a Marxist perspective, examining how the commodity of Higher Education may be fetishised and what role Widening Participation has in this fetishisation. This is particularly important because of the relationship between what Jessop et al (2008) described as the ‘hegemonic imaginary’ (i.e. the Knowledge Economy) and identifies the fetishisation of commodity acts functioning within a symbolic realm. As imageries, both the hegemonic (i.e. Knowledge Economy) and the analogy (fetish) provide ways of engaging with the intangibility of neoliberal ideology.

To employ the lens of Commodity Fetish here is an attempt to understand hidden and oppressive acts that Higher Education may be employed to conduct and/or perpetuate. Foucault’s relationship with Marxism is an important aspect to recognise because of the link between the fetish as disguised value of social relations and Foucault’s positioning on the forms of power that are covertly communicated within these hidden relationships. Marxism is for Foucault, ‘a ‘deterministic’ [and] a ‘deductivist’ approach. That is, it directs attention not just to the primacy of the economy but it seeks to explain the parts of a culture as explicable and decodable parts of the whole totality or system.’ (Olssen, 2005, p. 460-1). As part of a ‘total history’, this attempts to understand and explain totality in relation to a single centre, and is based on a ‘continuous chronology of reason’ (Foucault, 2002, p. 10). Instead, Foucault argues for a new or general history, whose role is to ‘determine what form of relation may be legitimately described between these different series’ (p. 10). As Olssen describes ‘[f]or Foucault, the explanatory quest is not to search for the organising principle of a cultural formation – whether the ‘economy’, or the
human subject’ or the ‘proletariat’. Rather, Foucault is interested in advancing a polymorphous conception of determination in order to reveal the ‘play of dependencies’ in the social and historical process’ (2005, p. 461).

This, therefore, rejects a neoliberal and Higher Education totality, whereby an identification of certain characteristics enables the production of a utopian opposite. This utopian opposite has been articulated within some of the constructed articulations of a defence of Public Higher Education. For example, Furedi (2011) promotes the ideal of learning for learning’s implicit value. In this way the creation of knowledge becomes another construction that does not fully incorporate the plurality of possibility because the arguments are based on binary oppositions.

Commodity Fetishism as a critical lens becomes a way of engaging with both the economic, political and social understanding of Widening Participation and Higher Education. In particular, it focuses on that which is concealed behind the language of commodification and the link between commodification and a neoliberal form of social justice that is achieved through the accumulation of wealth. Here, the individual that traverses Widening Participation and Higher Education only appears against a set of prescribed, fetishised values. These fetishised values are expressed through a form of fetishishsed pedagogical processes, some of which are influenced by Widening Participation discourse.

3.2.2 Background to Educational Fundamentalism

The concept of Educational Fundamentalism is defined by Alvesson (2013, p. 74) as ‘an ideology that expresses a strong belief – and often a naive blind faith – in the opportunities and positive results offered by education’. The notion that educational acts are powerful precisely because of the lack of criticality ascribed to their development is one that reiterates the notion of a powerful persuasive form of neoliberalism. The characteristics that construct this fundamentalism are neoliberal narratives of ‘a’ Higher Education. Alvesson describes these narratives of contemporary educational policy and practice that are difficult to critique because they perform as if for a social good.

The first characteristic of this Educational Fundamentalism is described as Zero-Sum Games. These function in relation to how consumption, supply and
demand occur. A zero-sum game is where ‘one person’s advantage corresponds directly to another person’s loss’ (Alvesson, 2013, p.7). It functions above providing the basic conditions for living and focuses on the acquisition of ‘positional goods’. These goods give an individual a status against a relative position. This relative position is described as ‘no longer an issue for a small elite, nor is it marginal phenomenon for the majority of people...The satisfaction following from economic growth depends on how you relate to others in terms of buying power and consumption’ (p. 5).

The second characteristic of Educational Fundamentalism is that of Grandiosity. This relates to something positional being given greater status through ‘positive – if somewhat superficial – well-polished and status-enhancing image’ (Alvesson, 2013, p. 8). Grandiosity enables the symbolic upgrading of the object to make it more ‘remarkable and impressive, adding to status and self-esteem... representing or loading phenomena such that they appear as attractive as possible within a framework of what seems reasonable’ (Ibid).

Illusion Tricks are the third narrative that is used within the development of Educational Fundamentalism. These are the ‘greater interest in conveying images and ideas that give the impression of something positive: progress, politically correct values, general rationality, and adaptive ability’ (Alvesson, 2013, p. 15).

Alvesson (2013, pp. 75-76) created a typology of Educational Fundamentalist characteristics that thread themselves through the three forms of narratives prevalent in the construction of social relations in and around Higher Education. These assumptions are described as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Education is something good, and its consequence should be described in positive terms.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Education and its expansion are crucial for economic growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>There are clear benefits from the individual viewpoint from investments in education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>You can’t get too much education – the more education the better.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Human beings can be formed – education institutions create the right kind of people.

The ability to perform at work is primarily achieved as a result of education.

Certain people may be defined as poorly educated. We should ensure that they can benefit from initiatives to remedy this negative situation.

Education is the solution to a great many problems, from unemployment to international competitive capability.

As much education as possible must be upgraded/relabelled as Higher Education.

The application of these characteristics positions Widening Participation as a constructed narrative, yet performing as part of the enlightenment project of education as social justice, ensuring social mobility through, for example, a removal of the ‘cap on aspirations’ (Osborne, 2013).

Similarly, in 2013 David Willetts released a report (Willetts, 2013), examining 50 years since the Robbins Report (Robbins, 1963). Contained within the report is an account of the growth and development of Higher Education, and, importantly, a justification for expanding Higher Education. According to the Director of the SMF (publisher of Willetts’ report) Higher Education is ‘...our best bet for equipping the UK economy with the skills it needs and [for] improving social mobility’ (O’ Brien, 2013). It is argued that the notion of ‘authentic citizen’, being ‘made’ ready to take their place within the knowledge and technology economies of the future is what drives the Widening Participation agenda. Those who are not part of that system are somehow undermining the potential future success of the economy. Therefore Widening Participation must happen to ensure that the market is sustainable.

To understand poststructuralist approaches as a way of understanding Educational Fundamentalism, I return to the concept of the commodity fetish. Dant (1996) suggests that highlighting the use of fetishist behaviour and idolatry can allow for critique that unearths a ‘real’ nature of the object: ‘To identify a fetish is to expose the inadequate beliefs of those who revere it for what they believe it is capable of, by pointing to the real, material, qualities of the object.'
and identifying its presumed capacities as really residing elsewhere - in the "true" god; in human labour; in arousal by a person of the opposite sex' (p. 496).

To uncover those ‘inadequate beliefs’ that generate a mythology of Higher Education that is part of a neoliberal ideology is to highlight a powerful (Western) economic and political narrative of the past 40 years. Additionally Dant’s (1996) assertion also suggests the notion that there is a ‘real' concept behind the fetish. The ‘real’ Widening Participation and Higher Education is, perhaps, thought to be located within a concept of social justice. Dant indicates inherent power dynamics contained within any given material object. It is not, however, simply a matter to unmask the illusion tricks and mythologies at play. The notion of the ‘real’ and the ‘materiality’ of an object that Dant suggests are problematic. Belsey (2005, p. 4) describes this problem: ‘while what we can know is entirely culturally relative, what exists becomes reducible, either explicitly or implicitly, to what can be said to exist'. Examining this further, and particularly from a poststructuralist position, offers a way of avoiding a binary of neoliberal appropriation and a ‘real' Widening Participation. This then creates ways of critically examining the notions of power in Higher Education discourse to enable greater explication of how Educational Fundamentalism is not just part of a traditionally argued binary relationship between neoliberalism and Socialism.

Employing the lens of Educational Fundamentalism offers an alternative approach to better understand the construction of Higher Education within England in 2013. A range of critical ideas will be used to help position the role of Widening Participation as part of a political and economic framework. By exploring the creation of a narrative of Higher Education through the development of Widening Participation practices, these practices can then be analysed as a process of what Rancière (1993) calls ‘Stultification’. This reasserts a hegemonic dominance over those being ‘helped’ by Widening Participation activities. It then becomes possible to locate Widening Participation to Higher Education not as an assumed liberal articulation of a moral imperative to open access to knowledge acquisition, but as an attempt to further control knowledge creation through the marketisation of the system.
3.2.3 Background to Stultification

The notion of Stultification, which in translation means to make one act or look foolish, is presented by Rancière (1991) as embodied in the educator who is ‘the more efficacious because he is knowledgeable, enlightened, and of good faith. The more he knows, the more evident to him is the distance between his knowledge and the ignorance of the ignorant ones’ (p. 7). The use of the word stultify as a translation of abrutir, according to the original translators note (Rancière, 1991, p. 7), evokes the idea of ‘numbing and deadening’ and is rooted in the ‘mediating intelligence of the master that relays the printed intelligence of written words to the apprentice’s’ (p. 9). Rancière suggests that this mediating act in teaching is ‘pedagogical stultification’, that which imposes an ‘imaginary distance’ between the teacher and the student that is never bridgeable. Stultification will occur ‘whenever one intelligence is subordinated to another’ (p. 13).

It is asserted by Rancière (1991) to be performed through increasingly oppressive teaching mechanisms that serve to reinforce hierarchical power structures in learning but appear to be functioning according to a traditional construction of an educator’s identity. The distance between the educator and the learner serves to position each within a set of social and knowledge hierarchies. It is enacted through normative discourses of intellectual emancipation where by the more you learn, the more you are emancipated from your ‘not knowing’. The educator’s role then is to guide the learner through the journey from ‘not knowing’ to ‘knowing’. This is what Rancière describes as the myth of pedagogy. This myth occurs around the modes of educational practice and is ‘the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones...’ (p. 6). Chapter Five focuses on recognising how assumptions regarding education can further serve to reinforce hegemonic practices. Applying Rancière’s theory, Widening Participation is examined as a performer in educational Stultification.

The impact of any form of Stultification through teaching and learning becomes more visible in neoliberal development models. Instead, Rancière (1991) suggests that intellectual emancipation comes from a shifting of conceptualising equality. For Rancière the basis of this oppression is the distinction between ‘knowing minds and ignorant minds’ (p. 6) and this creates, through the process
of explication, the myth of pedagogy. Stultification, then, is when learning is reduced down to explication (p. 7). This reduction to explication is a way of subjugating the learning individual to the mastery of the teacher. Normative narratives of Widening Participation are performing an act of Stultification as part of hegemonic practices within Higher Education. This is explored through examples of research that are positioned as examining the emancipatory performance of Widening Participation. If, however, the practice of Widening Participation is performing an act of neoliberal development and Higher Education is fetishised through pedagogical fetishism and commodified outputs of learning, then Widening Participation can only act as Stultification because of the hidden hegemonic and oppressive relationships within it.

This concept is employed to build upon the ideas present through commodity fetishism and Educational Fundamentalism in order to further deconstruct the basis for the design and implementation of Widening Participation and how this fits into contemporary discourse regarding Higher Education. In particular Stultification within pedagogy will be explored as expressed through notions of Higher Education as a "right". It is further focused upon as a form of emancipation that is argued here to perform according to neoliberal ideological predilections.

The act of Stultification is a result then, of the rhetoric of social justice being appropriated within the neoliberal framework. This act is part of the construction of social identities that, it is argued here, are established in order to maintain a profitable market within a Knowledge Economy. This chapter suggests that some of the outcomes identified by Alvesson (2013) as characteristics of Educational Fundamentalism are caused by Stultification within Higher Education and expressed through Widening Participation in order to fulfil a neoliberal educational agenda. This is, I suggest, part of the social power dynamic that occurs when marginalised identities are explored as elements of a political agenda. When repressed through hegemonic discourse of social justice these identities return to their marginalized origins, unable to enact the emancipation described in the educational rhetoric.
Chapter Four: 
Commodity Fetishism of and in Higher Education

4. Introduction

This chapter makes the case that it is possible to establish a premise for neoliberal relations between Higher Education and Widening Participation as a mechanism within neoliberal ideology. To understand the neoliberal focus of the role of Higher Education and Widening Participation at the end of the 20th/beginning of the 21st century Marx's (1990) concept of Commodity Fetishism is used here to examine how Higher Education is constructed within a neoliberal framework. This is the first critical lens to be applied to the topic and Lens One literature is identified within this chapter as [L1]. Marx's work on the fetish predates the work of Freud who would later apply it in psychoanalytic contexts. The use of a Marxist conceptualisation of the commodity fetish within this study also employs later developments of this notion by Lukács (1971) [L1] in his exploration of Reification. The concept of Reification is then specifically applied here to pedagogical topics and trends within Higher Education.

To employ the lens of commodity fetish here is an attempt to understand the hidden social and political constructions of Widening Participation to Higher Education within a commodity driven environment. Applied here, Commodity Fetish is a way in which to understand how that which is generated through social relations can become transformed into a commodity that has an extrinsic "exchange-value". A relationship between Higher Education and the economy may not be a new characteristic of Higher Education, in that Universities have always been connected to the social and economic needs of a country, as highlighted previously by Bok (1986) [HESB01]. The recent changes, however, in the way in which Higher Education is conceptualised, governed, audited and expected to perform has resulted in a Higher Education that is promoted as part of a ‘Knowledge Economy’. Promotion of the Knowledge Economy and its relationship to Higher Education has its roots in the work of Drucker (2007, originally published 1966) [L1] who identified the development of a knowledge worker that uses modes of intellectual production rather than the manual worker that uses their hands to produce objects. This has correlation with a growing culture of consumerism of Higher Education: it can be “purchased” by learners
(consumers) from those who teach within it (producers).

The purpose of this chapter is to:

1. Define and map out the utilisation of Fetishisation of the Commodity and potential critical applications of this lens to Higher Education and Widening Participation;

2. Explore the relationship between neoliberal ideology and Commodity Fetishism through examples drawn from contemporary Higher Education in England;

4.1 Commodification and Fetishisation of knowledge as a neoliberal construction

In order to understand the relevance of Commodity Fetishism within neoliberal ideology and the role this has in influencing changes to Higher Education through Widening Participation, an understanding of what it means is needed first. In particular, it is important to recognise how the concept of commodity fetish can be applied within a neoliberal context. Within this study commodity fetish is invoked as neoliberal when the commodity is knowledge. What Marx and Lukács have understood this concept to mean enables a deeper and more critical understanding of aspects of Higher Education practice within a neoliberal framework.

4.1.1 Defining Fetishisation of the Commodity

The concept of the ‘Fetishism of the Commodity’ appears in many of Marx’s writings, most notably in Capital, Volume 1 (1990), first published in 1867 [L1]. Importantly, this notion is borrowed from sacred societal structures, i.e. the worship of that which is not physical yet expressed through physical objectification, such as a religious icon. Marx suggests “[a] commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties...’ (p. 163). The ‘strangeness’ in the commodity is described by Marx as ‘the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities...this fetishism of the world of commodities arises from the peculiar
social character of the labour which produces them’ (p. 165). The fetish is derived from the idea of exchange. Exchange is fundamentally how much of another product a producer would get in exchange for their own product. Exchange is, however, inextricably linked to the ‘value character of the products of labour [which] becomes firmly established only when they act as magnitudes of value’ (p. 167). The labour involved in the production of the commodity is contained within the commodity itself when exchanged for something else. The fetish therefore, occurs when the labour involved in producing the commodity itself is ignored, misunderstood or under-valued in relation to the resultant product. It is possible to identify Higher Education in a similar way. When analysing the process of obtaining of an undergraduate degree, it is possible to describe relationships and activities that are hitherto unexposed. These are viewed here as disguised by social assumptions of the constructions of Higher Education. These assumptions reduce social relations and the perceived benefits of Higher Education into simple and easily locatable elements of learning that are then described in terms of exchange-value.

Significantly, Derrida (1993) [L1] suggests that the ‘strangeness’ Marx was describing is ‘the secret of the commodity form’ (p. 207). This secret is what connects the ideological (previously understood within religious societies) and the fetish: Derrida describes objective relations between things as ‘commerce between commodities’. This forms the foundation for a ‘form of the social relation between men’ (Ibid) that Derrida invokes within his own analogy with the spectre. Derrida brings forward the heritage or spectre itself as part of the construction of the notion of fetish. Fetishism, for Derrida, is part of the historical narrative of capitalism, because it is also part of the historical narrative of sacred society that capitalism was replacing. It is also, according to Derrida, within the realm of the psychological – it is not a physical or objective relation between objects. Instead it is a spectre itself of the social relations of a pre-capitalist or sacred society. Fetishism was located in religious contexts of worship and the manifestation of spiritual within rituals and objects that Marx appropriated to describe the developing worship of commodities. This, for Derrida, is ‘the only analogy possible, that of religion’ (p. 208, original italics).

Jameson (1999) [L1] would respond to this religious analogy in his critique of Derrida’s text. For Jameson, capitalism rejects the ‘extra-economic’ or non-
capitalist modes of production. In other words, pure economic modes of production are money and the market. This is a purely secular form of human life and society (p. 55). The notion of the extra-economic is crucial in identifying the commodity fetish, because at the same time of the extra-economic being removed through the creation of this “pure” economic society, it is unconsciously created in ‘the pursuit of the “fetishism of commodities”’ (Ibid). Jameson further suggests that the secular society Marx was describing was not yet in place, but ‘the end of the fetishism of commodities may well be connected to some conquest of social transparencies (provided that we understand that such transparency has never existed anyway): in which the collective labour stored in a given commodity is always and everywhere visible to its consumers and users’ (p. 55).

The notion of the extra-economic as the site for the fetishism of commodities relating to Widening Participation and Higher Education will be explored below. This is an attempt to understand how social relations in Higher Education became represented in commodified activity and subsequently fetishised, in part through Widening Participation. Within Higher Education, this can be seen as forms of reified pedagogical practices and trends within the sector that utilise this spectre analogy: Higher Education carries some “otherness” as this spectre, and it is this that has been codified. If Higher Education was an extra-economic or non-economic mode of production at the time that neoliberal development models were being developed in political contexts, it became an imperative to reconstruct its mode of production as economic in order to gain control of the knowledge at the centre of the future Knowledge Economy.

4.1.2 Distinguishing between Commodification and Fetishisation

Within an evolving capitalist society the economic form of Higher Education has been constructed according to its cost and the contribution and ownership over knowledge creation to the economy. Specifically, those with a Higher Education are seen to be significant contributors to the economy and are primary producers, reconstructing knowledge creation as a mode of production. This is produced through the commodification of Higher Education, achieved through the marketisation and the massification of its structures.

In particular, it is possible to see the market model adopted by the sector as
one that reduces social relations between learners, teachers and knowledge to fetishistic rituals of reified outputs. Marx (1990) [L1] made the link between commodity and the fetish by invoking the notion of fetish as part of a narrative to understand the construction of commodity within a capitalist society. Applied here, the invocation of learning through neoliberal rhetoric of social justice produces commodified outputs (forms of assessment; degrees; notions of pedagogy), that themselves stand as representative of a Higher Education. The fetish lies, then, within how the traditional relations between teacher-learner-knowledge are perceived and what benefit they are supposed to provide. Jameson (1999) [L1] suggested the fetishisation of commodities can only be stopped once a transparency of social relations is exerted. It is for this reason that the Paraversity that Rolfe (2013) [HESB02] promoted cannot necessarily succeed in subverting the 'University of Excellence', in that it does not establish transparent social relations between teacher-student-knowledge as it is running parallel to what it is trying to subvert. It is only when transparent or non-covert relations take place that the fetishism can be stopped. This too, has been appropriated by the neoliberal through the notion of Quality and the suggestion that the market model provides greater, not lesser transparency of practices.

Taking this as a foundation, part of the following identification results in the assertion of a commodification of Higher Education that relates to the growing impact of market forces. If commodification has occurred then it is logical that a commodity must be produced. This commodity can exist as the Higher Education sector as a whole but can also exist within particular examples including recruitment and the marketing of institutional identities selling aspects of programmes that are seen to be attractive and serving a social “good” (such as Employability or Internationalisation and explored below). According to Marx (1990) [L1] a commodity is not just a simple ‘thing’: the strangeness that he described in the associated fetishism exists as social relations expressed through the exchange of commodities. This fetishism is attached not to the labour itself but what is produced from that labour.

Most literature that has critiqued the commodification of Higher Education has done so in the form of a defence against capitalist appropriation. It is suggested here that using the notion of commodity fetishism enables this analysis to explore more deeply the implications for the commodification of Higher
Education within social constructions of relations between teacher-student-knowledge. In particular this is founded within the idea that Rubin identified (2007) [L1] in terms of relations constructed through production of the commodity that are disguised by the exchange of that commodity. Within this thesis the use of commodity or commodification is used when an object is being exchanged (either in actuality or metaphorically). The use of fetish or fetishisation indicates an expression of the social construction around the exchange of commodity.

4.1.3 Exchange-Values of Higher Education

Importantly, for Rubin (2007) [L1], Marx identified that in ‘the commodity economy, social production relations inevitably took the form of things and could not be expressed except through things. The structure of the commodity economy causes things to play a particular and highly important social role and this to acquire particular social properties’ (p6). When applied to contemporary Higher Education within England, it is possible to track Marx’s (1990) [L1] assertion that ‘Value, therefore, does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic’ (p. 167). What he is meaning here relates to apparent social relations that are maintained within an object. Higher Education, therefore, can also be positioned as evolving in a way that appears to conduct itself within socio-cultural parameters (i.e. the creation of new knowledge). Within a neoliberal interpretation, however, it offers an example of how value is transferred from the labour of knowledge to the commodity of knowledge production. Higher Education gives examples of the ‘use-value’ of itself through reification of externally verifiable performance measures such as employment rates of graduates and the ‘embeddedness’ of employability preparation within programmes. Likewise, readiness for participation in a global economy can be signalled through interventions within curriculum designed to demonstrate the value of the programme on a global platform under the guise of 'Internationalising the Curriculum'.

These reified notions of Higher Education, provide objective characteristics that enable aspects of an individuals’ Higher Education to become valued in regards to its usefulness. It also promotes a market need for Higher Education itself.
These two features are essential in the transformation of use-value into a commodity but what is important here is what Marx defines as use-value:

'The usefulness of a thing makes it a use-value. But this usefulness does not dangle in mid-air. It is conditioned by the physical properties of the commodity, and has no existence apart from the latter. It is, therefore, the physical body of the commodity itself, for instance iron, corn, a diamond, which is the use-value or useful thing. This property of a commodity is independent of the amount of labour required to appropriate its useful qualities...Use-values are only realized in use or in consumption. They constitute the material content of wealth, whatever its social form may be. In the form of society to be considered here they are also the material bearers of...exchange value’ (Marx, 1990, p. 126).

The idea that the value of a commodity is only important when in use is significant to my argument. It could be said that there is now the assumption that a Higher Education is only of any value, when there is an identifiable use-value i.e. when it can be used for something rather than being of value in and of itself. The latter cannot exist within neoliberalism because of its foundations in market model capitalism. Jameson (1999) [L1] cautions, however, against thinking of use-value as a ‘nostalgic survival...if we project it into what we imagine to be a simpler past, a past before the market, in which objects are somehow used and valued for themselves...' (p. 55). Objections that focus on Higher Education as providing learning for learning’s intrinsic value can appear nostalgic in the way that Jameson describes. Even Furedi (2011) [HESB03] in his invocation of the spectres of Socrates and Plato and their notions of learning, does not escape this formulation.

The concept of value is important within Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism. Dant (1996, p. 496) [L1] describes Marx’s understanding of a commodity fetish as

'[T]he reality of the commodity is its representation of congealed labour through which it derives its value. In its unreal or fetishised form the commodity appears to have intrinsic value derived from its material character. The fetishised commodity represents a misconception of the origins of value - the system of ideas supporting capitalist production that Marx calls 'commodity
fetishism”.

Dant (1996) [L1] poses the idea that the material qualities of a commodity that hide the input of labour, actually contribute to the value of the object, and the labour is congealed or static in terms of its social foundations. Interestingly, Dant considers the form of the object ‘unreal’ as a fetishised commodity and this has implications for how Higher Education may be perceived as such. When Dant associates the ‘unreal’ with the fetishism of commodity, the idea of authenticity and what is ‘real’ in relation to Higher Education starts to come into question.

An example of this can be found in the relationship between contact (teaching) hours and self-directed learning time. The consumer watchdog *Which?* began to scrutinise offers made by HEIs and have produced the *Which? University Contact Hours Comparison Tool* (Which?, 2015) [RRSW01] that allows an individual to search programmes and their advertised contact hours. In QAA guidance for students regarding contact hours, however, it is stated that higher levels of contact hours do not necessarily indicate a better programme: ‘There is no evidence to suggest that quality, understood in this sense, can be measured solely by contact hours’ (QAA, 2011, p. 3) [RRSW02]. Likewise, in research conducted by the NUS in collaboration with the QAA exploring the Student Experience (NUS, 2012) [RRSW03], conclusions reached include the promotion of contact hours being part of the Key Information Sets (KIS) all HEIs are required to publish allowing individuals to make a more informed choice. It is these KIS that have also allowed *Which?* to create the aforementioned comparison tool. The report additionally suggests that students value the quality of the contact alongside the volume (p. 22). The rise however, of mechanisms such as the *Which? Comparison Tool* negates these suggestions. The rise in tuition fees has seen a correlative rise in scrutiny regarding the volume of contact hours a course may provide a student with, particularly in comparison with competitor courses and courses from other disciplines. Contact hours become symbolic of a value that acts as a proxy for quality when abstracted within a consumer comparison model. These models have been developed through competitor markets such as insurance, credit cards, where ‘compare’ becomes synonymous with getting a ‘better deal’ (or more for less). Comparing contact hours signals a paradigmatic shift whereby individuals, particularly
individuals who may not have much familial experience with Higher Education, use these comparison tools to make decisions regarding their choice of programme based on similar principles as comparison websites for mortgages or mobile phone contracts.

4.2 Higher Education as a Commodity

In order to ascertain whether commodity fetishisms of Higher Education does exist Higher Education must be explored explicitly as a commodity itself. In order to understand Widening Participation to Higher Education’s role in a neoliberal paradigm of Higher Education, the production of what is being fetishised must likewise be understood in relation to the commodity being produced.

Marx defines commodity as ‘an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind. The nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the stomach, or the imagination, makes no difference’ (1990, p. 125) [L1]. In this regard, it is possible to understand Higher Education as a site of the production of knowledge as Commodity. This comes particularly through the development of increased student contributions to the cost of their education as discussed earlier. It can also be perceived through documents that HEIs are compelled to provide to all students as threshold mechanisms of how they articulate a provision of a “Quality Experience”: Student Charters, Learner Contracts; Programme and Module Handbooks; Learning Objectives. The social relations maintained traditionally in Higher Education were those between student and teacher, however the potential impact of increasing tuition fees alters the perceived frameworks for how this is conceptualised (see, for example, Callender 2002 [WPJA10], who describes contradictions in Labour policy and the introduction of tuition fees).

One example of how these social relations become reduced into concepts that are then transformed into commodity packages is that of the perceived role of Higher Education in producing entrepreneurs of the Knowledge Economy. The entrepreneur as an aspect of neoliberalism can be found within positions taken in the 1980s by Thatcher and her supporter Sir Keith Joseph (Lee and McBride, 2007, p. 4) [L1]. This term, familiar now within the Higher Education context in the guise of a graduate attribute, highlights the persuasive power of
neoliberalism. The rise of the entrepreneur and entrepreneurial spirit as a favoured characteristic articulates a ‘faith in the market as a discovery process for entrepreneurs to acquire the knowledge and information that would enable them to take risks and innovate to provide new goods and services to consumers’ (Lee and McBride, 2007, pp. 5-6) [L1]. The knowledge and service that Lee and McBride refer to, starts to indicate a transformation from Industrialised capitalism, heavily involved with the production of things, to a ‘Knowledge Economy’, and importantly a moral superiority ‘because of its maximisation of individual liberty from the state’ (Lee and McBride, 2007, p. 6). This moral imperative is used as a justification of the neoliberal position and manifests in many different ways but one of the key considerations here is the rise of the Knowledge Economy as a way of enabling this to become realised in social activity. The role of the HEI within the larger educational system then, is as the platform that provides the required workforce for this Knowledge Economy as prescribed by the neoliberal agenda as ‘human capital’.

This form of capital produces a self-perpetuating learning society that is created through a Knowledge Economy, which was described by Kennedy (1997) [WPR09] as the ‘irresistible’ rationale for Widening Participation (Ibid). Jones (2008) [WPRE04] describes the rationale for widening access to underrepresented social-economic groups within this context was as the only way to increase participation: ‘The concept therefore became more sharply focused on under-representation – specifically, on the rates at which those from lower socio-economic groups, and more recently with disabilities, were progressing to HE’ (p. 1).

Williams (2011) [HESB04] suggests that improving access to Higher Education is seen as a necessity for the development and security of a Knowledge Economy by including more and more individuals as contributing factors. The future of Widening Participation as an institutional practice has moved beyond a social or moral imperative: instead it is now an economic and regulatory mechanism to ensure that Higher Education fulfils its function within the knowledge society or a way of understanding an institution’s market position (McCaig, 2011 [WPSB06]). The impact of this within Higher Education can be examined in a number of examples that are explored below. The first theme
that exemplifies this is the changing relationship between student and teacher.

4.2.1 Relationships between student and teacher

In 2013-2014 members of HE Unions voted for industrial action in the form of strikes and an escalation of action in the form of a proposed marking boycott. The University and Colleges Union (UCU) planned a marking boycott in April 2014 in protest against what was considered to be an unacceptable pay offer of a 1% increase. The #Markmywork Twitter campaign was run by students in opposition to the planned April 2014 Marking Boycott and serves here as a potent example of how the higher tuition fees are forming a consumer (undergraduate at least) student body.

Although the boycott was eventually cancelled due to negotiation agreements over pay, during this time a site of tension was observed between teachers within Higher Education and part of the student population, which was particularly evident in social media. Some confusion was evident in perceptions evident on Twitter regarding the actual earnings and the type of work a teacher in Higher Education does. Comments on Twitter are by no means representative of the entire student population and they are not used as such here. It does, however, give some indication of how a ‘consumer student’ could be developing. Interestingly, the comments left by some Twitter commentators via #Markmywork, give clear examples of the Commodity Fetish described above. One commentator writes ‘I’m paying £8000 a year and they want to go on a strike and not mark our work? It’s not like they don’t get paid enough’. Another states ‘If you can’t mark my work on time then I can’t hand my work in on time!’ (Vole, 2014) [RRSW04]. These two comments reflect the changing relationship between student and teacher, becoming a transaction of money (tuition fees) for marks (in the sense that the teacher has to mark an assessment). By potentially withholding the labour of marking assessments, this issue has highlighted the divorce of labour from the production of the commodity, resulting in the fetish of Higher Education.

This articulates the notion of student as consumer that has been described by Furedi (2011, p. 2) [HESB03] as recasting ‘the relationship between academics and students along the model of service provider and consumer’. Furedi uses
the term ‘academic’ to refer to the intellectual position of those I have been describing as ‘teacher’. This is important as it might be possible to suggest that both my use of the term ‘teacher’ and Furedi’s use of the term ‘academic’ suggests something about the way in which we view and engage with Higher Education. Regardless of this, Furedi indicates that this changing relationship imposes the pressure of the market on the Higher Education sector, and, according to the logic of the market model causes an unresponsive University to acknowledge ‘the customer is always right, the University had better listen to the student’ (p. 3). Again, Furedi uses the term ‘University’ to indicate something about the way Higher Education is conceptualised as a site rather than a mechanism. There are also implicit assertions of Higher Education as a commodity when Furedi states: ‘...it is likely that sections of the leadership of [H]igher [E]ducation have come to internalise the ideology of marketisation to the point where they find it difficult to distinguish between an academic relationship and a commercial transaction’ (p. 3). Understanding these relationships through the lens of Commodity Fetish highlights the tacit engagements with knowledge that take place under the guise of commercial transaction.

It is possible to see in Furedi’s assertions a similarity to Williams (2013) [HESB04] who explores the notion of the ‘Student as Consumer’ as a result from not just the recent alterations to the Higher Education system in the UK but as a historical instrumentalism disguised as a tool for empowering students. This, Williams (p. 140) argues, creates a ‘commodity for students to consume, universities [as a result] come to be concerned with many “ends” besides “the internal good of imparting knowledge”’. This results in a reduction of Higher Education ‘to employability skills that students can trade in the post-graduation labour market for future earnings’ (Ibid).

Another example of the consumer attitude is the development of law firms ready to take on cases of appeal. Many companies offer this but one is given as an example in Fig. 2 below. The right to appeal against an institutional judgement is a different matter that is important, but not intrinsic to this argument. What is of interest is the language used within the advert that has appeared on another social media site, Facebook.
It suggests negligence of the institution or at the very least issues of responsibilities, roles and expectations of the claimant and even that an educational process can result in the student transforming into a claimant. The service on offer (advertised on the company website) is preparations for University appeals and requests to the OIA, the body that reviews student complaints. The indication within the advert however, focuses on de-registration through failing a module, suggesting, superficially that it may be possible to be re-registered if you fail a module, putting into question what it means to fail. This recalls Furedi (2011) [HESB03] and his suggestion relating to the notion that ‘[t]he culture of complaint has encouraged the emergence of a form of ‘defensive education’ that is devoted to minimising sources of disputes that have the potential to lead to complaint and litigation’ (p. 3).

Academic work, which is assumed here to include teaching, does not,
according to Furedi (2011, p. 6) [HESB03] fit well with the commodification of Higher Education – it becomes ‘dominated by concerns that have little to do with education’. Instead, he continues, academics run the risk of changing ‘into the trainers of customers...’ (Ibid). Furedi also suggests that ‘marketisation works as an essentially ideological or public relations accomplishment’ that is more closely aligned with social engineering. The argument that Furedi puts forward could be seen as nostalgic posturing, trying to assert ‘the good old days’ before learning outcomes; module handbooks; Institutional and National Surveys of Student Satisfaction (in the UK this is the National Student Survey); or Surveys that map the destination of graduates (in the UK this is the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey), indicating the success in graduates gaining graduate employment. Instead, however, by invoking Socrates, Plato and Mill, Furedi is locating the acts of learning and teaching outside of a transactional relationship.

For Furedi (2011) [HESB03] learning and teaching cannot take place as a commodified act. Something else is created in its place that he suggests belong to a programme akin to social engineering and consumer satisfaction. Higher Education, then, becomes a commodity when it is seen to satisfy a human need that can be exchanged. That human need however, is now constructed through the neoliberal paradigm of a Knowledge Economy, and Higher Education becomes a performer that normalises consumer transaction of knowledge creation. Higher Education has to function in this way in order for the Knowledge Economy to continue. Here Furedi appears to succumb to the nostalgia of previous incarnations of Higher Education, but the significant point being made is the Knowledge Economy would have no equivalent ‘producer’, and therefore, no products (i.e. knowledge) to transact. This would then complement the positioning of the Public University that writers within Holmwood (2011) [HESB06] propose. Within both visions individuals (i.e. students) entering into Higher Education who did not see themselves as consumers would no longer be complicit in the generation of a Knowledge Economy as they would no longer identify with the consumer patterns of satisfaction Furedi outlines that manifest in course choice and satisfaction surveys. It would no longer be possible to fetishise the commodity of Higher Education. It is, therefore, possible to understand what takes place within
Higher Education (i.e. learning, teaching and research) as ‘commodified’ with the sector itself undergoing a process of commodification.

Exchange value of a commodified Higher Education has three implications in practice. The first is in relation to the student learner and their own fetishisation of what a Higher Education gives them. This is, in part, regarding the debt they potentially may take on in paying their tuition fees and in part what it gives them in terms of future employment opportunities. The second implication is how a teacher within Higher Education intersects within this framework. There are three ways in which this could manifest: 1. Changing what and how they are teaching in order to satisfy the assumptions and expectations of the student learner; 2. Maintaining a traditional approach that rejects the student as a necessary partner in the learning and teaching relationship as constructed in neoliberal terms; 3. Developing a third way that allows for both approaches to coexist. The third implication of exchange-value is the fetishisation of Higher Education within the neoliberal framework. This means that neoliberal practices are promoted and pursued within Higher Education at the same time as being replicated and reproduced in the products and mechanisms being developed in response.

4.2.2 Commodity Fetishism of Higher Education as a neoliberal feature

A key aspect of neoliberal ideology is the combination of the free trade and market model combined with notions of individual liberty and it is this that demarcates it from other capitalist ventures. The commodification suggested above produces a Higher Education that functions in a particularly neoliberal manner to develop appropriate participants in a Knowledge Economy and at the same time increases equal opportunity to participate in such an economy. The fetishisation, expressed through various examples above, highlight potential tensions between differing views of what Higher Education is held to be (by both learners and teachers) and what its purpose is, particularly within a neoliberal context. The purpose of a Higher Education has multiple incarnations even within the broad categories of students, teachers, and politicians. The neoliberal narrative of Higher Education predicates the interests of the Knowledge Economy more generally rejecting the perceived ‘Ivory Tower’ of Higher Education. As a historical representation of the gated community of
knowledge creation, in place for its own sake, this notion of an Ivory Tower invokes a sense of elitism and preventing social mobility. Rejecting this places the importance on choice and consumer voice as a way of rationalising changes to Higher Education in order to break down of the gated community affect. Likewise, the issue of how to open up this gated community is played out through Widening Participation debates.

Here, neoliberalism asserts a claim for the independence of Higher Education through the removal of state interference in governance. This, accordingly, allows the Institutions of Higher Education to develop in a way that is dictated to by the consumers rather than the state. The fetish in this narrative would seem to be held by those who reject the massification of Higher Education (such as Holmwood 2011 [HESB06] and Docherty 2011 [HESB07]) seeking a return to their “authentic” narratives of Higher Education. This narrative of Higher Education can be constructed as a Public Higher Education that rejects Massification and is held to be authentic by those who defend it. This would also suggest when the exchange-value of learning and teaching becomes confused between learners and educators; neoliberal ideology successfully subverts traditional models of learning and teaching through this exchange-value tension.

A commodity fetishism of Higher Education by learners, some teachers and administrators, and neoliberal proponents, reduces the labour of learning into a measure of consumer satisfaction. This, at the same time potentially decreases diversity through the closure of departments and the redesign of programmes to respond to market forces. As Furedi (2011, pp. 2-4) [HESB03] describes, programmes and individuals that either no longer measure up in terms of satisfaction, recruitment or relevancy to the Knowledge Economy are removed from the market because of the lack of consumer demand. Conversely, institutional marketing rhetoric increasingly focuses on the distinctiveness of the programmes on offer (such as the previously mentioned University of Excellence/Opportunity/Enterprise) to identify the area of the Higher Education market that they compete within.

As discussed above the social character, i.e. the relationship maintained between student and teacher, is in a continual evolution thus the expectations
associated with traditional modes of teaching and learning within Higher Education are altered. Neoliberal ideology challenges and creates tension in the relationships that are foundational to traditional Higher Education. The notions of consumerism within student satisfaction that are verifiable through module evaluations and the National Student Survey and comparison models of elements of programme design that are exchanged for tuition fees shift the value of Higher Education, which becomes located somewhere other than within the actual learning that takes place. Therefore, on a bigger scale, it is possible to see the notion that Dant (1996) [L1] highlights of the hidden (concealed) labour ascribed to the intrinsic value of a commodity that forms the basis of subsequent discussions here regarding the generation of the myth of Higher Education. In particular, the value derived from the material character of the commodity hides the labour behind the development of said commodity. This is used to create reified aspects of Higher Education that give the impression of the ‘origins of value’ (i.e. Employability or Internationalisation) and is intrinsic to the neoliberal value of Higher Education. In effect, however, fetishisation of the commodity of Higher Education occurs through the concealment of ‘the peculiar social character of the labour which produces them’ (Marx, 1990, p. 165) [L1].

The relationship that Furedi (2011) [HESB03] described between student and academic signalled the change from learner and teacher to consumer and producer. Perceiving Higher Education as a fetishised commodity allows for a more complex understanding of how this functions as part of a symbolic system because of the relationships implicit in the transactional nature of this development. Therefore, characteristics such as Employability and Entrepreneurship; Enterprising the Curriculum; Internationalisation of the Curriculum; and Sustainability are all contemporary topics emphasised by Institutions and have, for example, been highlighted themes promoted by the Higher Education Academy and can be found on their website identified as ‘workstreams’ (HEA 2015) [RRSW05]. These can be examined as examples of reified concepts. These concepts, I suggest, are rooted in previous social interactions and considered a benefit of a Higher Education that have now been identified as having exchange-value and promote a commodified Higher Education.
4.3 Reification of Pedagogical Topics in Higher Education

The notion of Reification as a form of Commodity Fetishism enables further identification of concepts that have particular contemporary currency within Higher Education and two specific examples are explored here. The first example, Employability is chosen as an example of a curriculum topic to be embedded within teaching to help drive forward a meaning for Higher Education. In other words, to ensure that Higher Education has a role within the Knowledge Economy, graduates must be employable and a mechanism to ensure this is by focusing curriculum on an employability agenda. The second example of reification is discussed through the notion of the Higher Education teacher as the proletariat. By briefly analysing this potential identification, the impact of reified pedagogical practices can be considered.

4.3.1 Reification as a form of Commodity Fetishism in Higher Education

Reification, the making of a thing, represents part of the practice within commodity fetishisation. Lukács (1971) [L1] described this as: ‘Reification requires that a society should learn to satisfy all its needs in terms of commodity exchange. The separation of the producer from his means of production, the dissolution and destruction of all ‘natural’ production units, etc., and all the social and economic conditions necessary for the emergence of modern capitalism tend to replace ‘natural’ relations which exhibit human relations more plainly by rationally reified relations’ (p. 91). In creating a ‘thing’ and through this action reducing interaction into its exchange-value, reification as a form of commodity fetish provides a critical tool to examine practices within Higher Education. In particular, it enables the illumination of commonly utilised concepts that have transcended meaning in relation to human interaction and instead represent exchange-value in terms of recruitment, satisfaction and progression.

An example of Reified pedagogical practices, which Furedi (2011, p. 3) [HESB03] might link to the ‘disturbing tendency to equate academic teaching with a technique’ are pedagogical developments that support the notion of Employability. The technique in this case refers to some kind of formula within curricula and teaching that results in a greater possibility of an employable graduate. If it is assumed that the relationship between student and teacher is
culturally constructed then the influence of political development strategies has influenced previously constructed understandings of the student/teacher relationship. In pedagogical developments focused on Employability, for example, the notion of Employability itself is an illustration of reification. Employability becomes the ‘mechanically objectified ‘performance’ of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality: in short, it becomes space’ (Lukács, 1971, p. 90) [L1]. The worker is, in this case the teacher, and the performance is measured through the Employability of their graduates. There is some evidence of this in action more generally within Higher Education in the way the statistics from the DLHE survey are used as marketing strap lines, regardless of how reliable the statistics actually are. These are therefore viewed as measures of success against key performance indicators of institutional success in learning and teaching. In addition the plethora of conferences, workshops and papers exploring the embedding of employability within the curriculum focus enhancing the employability of students serve as a reminder that this is a priority issue for Higher Education. For example, the authors of Pedagogy for Employability (Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac & Lawton, 2012) [RRSW06] unwittingly describe this reification.

The guidance (Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac & Lawton, 2012) [RRSW06] is promoted by the Higher Education Academy, and employability pedagogy is described as: ‘the teaching and learning of a wide range of knowledge, skills and attributes to support continued learning and career development’ (p. 7). More specifically, they claim that ‘graduate employability as a core interest, engaging both students and staff, will be crucially important in an era of increased costs, higher tuition fees and loans, and increased competition for initial, and continuing, employment locally, nationally and internationally’ (p. 6). Although the authors acknowledge uncritical assumptions in other publications regarding the Knowledge Economy, Employability is not questioned in regard to its place within a Higher Education, other than it will be a compulsion in order for institutions to make claims that fees are well spent. Within the discussion regarding employability they talk of ‘employment ‘gains’ for diverse groups of students now participating in higher education [which] suggests that the ability to articulate learning and raising confidence, self-esteem and aspirations seem to be more significant in developing graduates than a narrow focus on skills and
competences’ (p. 9). This relates to what Rubin (2007) [L1] described as originating in social interactions that then become commodified. In other words the interaction of individuals is transformed within the commodity model as an output described as Employability. This obtains an exchange-value in relation to tuition fees and the apparent securing of future employment.

4.3.2 The Higher Education teacher as proletariat

The impact of implementing these reified curriculum devices falls most openly on those teaching. It is possible to see the academic, once a beacon for intellectual discovery and perhaps part of a bourgeois intelligentsia, as the Knowledge Economy’s proletariat, i.e. an individual who earns their income through the sale of their labour power. Marx (1990) [L1] distinguished between the working class poor and the proletariat. This proletariat, according to Marx, occupies subordinate positions within capitalist Society, which by its very construction relies on underclasses. The proletariat then, feels the effects of economic depression and stagnation of wages. The idea that well educated individuals can be oppressed and exist as a subordinate strata of contemporary society through (to use the market metaphor) the tyranny of industrialised capitalists seems fantastical. Yet there are emerging activities and tensions that mark this out as being highly plausible. One of these has been generated through the increasing tensions between the University and Colleges Union (UCU) on behalf of their members regarding pay increase and the University and Colleges Employers’ Association (UCEA). Within this neoliberal paradigm in producing objects in “graduates” and “knowledge” that are transferable in an exchange practice. The exchange-value of graduates becomes observable by the approach to the reified pedagogical concepts such as Internationalisation and Employability discussed above.

A graduate could have more confidence that they are employable if their institution has sufficiently invested in Employability agendas and embeds Employability within their programmes. In this way an institution positions themselves within a market in a similar manner to how McCaig (2011) [WPSB06] describes the use of Widening Participation to position an institution within a niche area. Likewise a graduate could feel more confident in a global market, if they have attended an HEI that has a mission statement that clearly outlines its
'global positioning’ and has a strong commitment to Internationalisation of the Curriculum. What this does, then, is question the agency of the individual student in this relationship, with a focus on what the programme provides rather than a focus on the interaction. It is possible that the removal of student agency is a result of this reification of objects within Higher Education. Agency and emancipation are removed in this context and replaced with exchange-value relations. This could also correlate with the removal of teacher agency within Higher Education. The social relations are removed from their relationship and the objects that are produced (the material characteristics in particular) are the focus of markers of satisfaction and programme development teams.

The blogger Plashing Vole, (a teacher in Higher Education who writes under this pseudonym) commented on the developing identity of a proletariat teacher in April 2014. Writing about the #Markmywork campaign, which was discussed as a representation of increasing student consumerism, Plashing Vole (2014) [RRSW04] states on the blog ‘[h]aving been proletariatised our only option is to withdraw our labour’. Here, the blogger aligns the teaching-body with the work force using the classic Marxist term. With the rise of a ‘Knowledge Economy’, the proletariat becomes those who are responsible for the production of the main commodity of the age (i.e. knowledge) therefore within Higher Education, teaching staff become akin to the proletariat.

The potential to perceive the academic as a proletariat within the Knowledge Economy is rejected by one #Markmywork commentator: ‘Some senior lecturers are paid a bomb – on par with bankers!’ (quoted by Plashing Vole, 2014) [RRSW04]. Here, the ‘banker’ becomes a proxy for an overpaid and seemingly corrupt part of society that this individual student relates to the action-taking teacher. Here the commentators construct the teachers’ position as being synonymous with bankers and the ruling elite. This view of salary suggests a view that perceives the strike action to be that of those that want more for doing less. It further enforces another perception of a fracture between student and teacher. This fracture of how a socially constructed and historically determined relationship between student and teacher is perceived is absolutely vital for the market model of Higher Education to succeed.

Furedi (2011, p. 4) [HESB03] argues that the neoliberal teacher in Higher
Education is one that Socrates would compare to ‘those who sell their caresses’. There is an assumption of the complicity of a Higher Educationalist with the marketisation of Higher Education itself. Those who do embed Employability within their lectures or look at ways to internationalise their curriculum could be seen within this framework to be part of the neoliberal commodification of Higher Education and as much a part of perpetuating a fetishisation as the neoliberal policy makers. Yet, an attempt to examine this outside of a binary position of complicity/non-complicity also suggests that lecturers who refuse to meet the various demands and needs of diverse cohorts of students could be reactionary not revolutionary. In addition, the proletariat educationalist may be perceived as working under oppressive measures and the ability to reject the governing forces in this context is difficult.

There are at least three identifiable types of Educationalists in Higher Education: 1) the revolutionary educationalist who rejects the neoliberal approach to Higher Education; 2) the persecuted educationalist who dislikes or may actually be unaware of a neoliberal influence on Higher Education other than perhaps student tuition fees. The National Student Satisfaction Survey as one example within this context may be perceived as playing a positive role in giving the student agency within their education or as another hoop to be jumped through and responded to. This educationalist may feel compelled to adhere to the dominance of the discourse; 3) the neoliberal educator who sees the market model as an opportunity to make a profit for themselves out of the product they produce. The notion of Educational Fundamentalism is the result of neoliberal ideology exerting pressure on educational discourse. This reduces education into exchangeable outputs and is defined by Alvesson (2013, p. 74) as ‘an ideology that expresses a strong belief – and often a naive blind faith – in the opportunities and positive results offered by education.’ The impact of this Educational Fundamentalism is the focus of Chapter Five (as the second conceptual lens) and in particular how it manifests in what Furedi (2011) [HESB03] has identified as the second and third type of educational practices above.

4.4 Conclusion

The concept of fetishisation of a commodity can be applied to the Higher
Education sector and the outputs produced by it (most notably graduates and knowledge). As part of a ‘Knowledge Economy’ Higher Education can be seen to play a fundamental production role in that it invokes notions presented by Marx relating to the dominance of capitalist hierarchies and the transformation of social interactions in the production process into fetishised objects. The fetishisation of Higher Education lies in the development of consumer models of practice and promotes social relations based on the exchange of these products.

These practices can be identified as products of Higher Education. Reification of pedagogy through the development of topics such as Employability, encourage the shift away from the social underpinnings of pedagogy to an output focused approach to learning and teaching. These become symptomatic of neoliberalism and remove traditional values of learning and teaching.
5. Introduction

As argued in Chapter Four, the neoliberal form of Commodity Fetishism expressed in Higher Education is one that constructs knowledge as an exchange-value output (commodity) and the relationships between teacher and student that produce this output are commodified to the extent where they do not exist socially or physically but only via their exchange-value (fetish). The expressions of educational fetish become represented through reified concepts of pedagogical practice. This form of Commodity Fetishism is argued here to produce Educational Fundamentalism. This is the second critical lens to be applied to the topic and Lens Two literature is identified within this chapter as [L2]. Alvesson (2013) [L2] outlines the concept of Educational Fundamentalism and identifies characteristics that construct particular neoliberal narratives of ‘a’ Higher Education. Alvesson pays particular attention to a generic form of Western Higher Education but here I focus on the UK context and specifically the Higher Education sector of England.

Alvesson (2013) [L2] describes these neoliberal narratives in the form of Zero-Sum games, Grandiosity and Illusion Tricks and it is these concepts that are further investigated and applied within this chapter to form an understanding of neoliberal narratives of Higher Education articulated through Widening Participation. The identification of Educational Fundamentalism as a product of neoliberal fetishisation enables Widening Participation to be examined as a form of mythological construct that perpetuates this fetishisation of Higher Education. This example of the fetish occurs in extra-economic modes of production. In other words, the fetish cannot be expressed directly relating to the commodity in this context, as the commodity is not a physical object: it is knowledge or the creation of knowledge. Instead, the fetish symbolically identifies the exchange-value of forms of production within Higher Education. This means the social mobility that Higher Education promotes under the guise of social justice is the fetishistic expression of the commodification of Higher Education performed through Widening Participation.

Educational Fundamentalism is applied here to understand Widening
Participation that perpetuates a neoliberalisation of Higher Education. In this way Educational Fundamentalism translates a Neoliberal form of social justice and Commodity Fetishism both directly into Higher Education and via Widening Participation. This enables an understanding of Widening Participation as part of the neoliberal power structure, analysed here from a poststructuralist perspective.

The purpose of this chapter is to:

1. Outline how Widening Participation is part of and perpetuates a form of Educational Fundamentalism as part of the Knowledge Economy;

2. Explore Educational Fundamentalism and narratives of Higher Education told, in part, through Widening Participation;

3. Analyse examples of concepts of Widening Participation used in extending the reach of Educational Fundamentalism as a form of neoliberal Higher Education.

5.1 Educational Fundamentalism as a way of seeing Higher Education

The concept of Educational Fundamentalism is defined by Alvesson (2013, p.74) [L2] as ‘an ideology that expresses a strong belief – and often a naive blind faith – in the opportunities and positive results offered by education.’ The notion that educational acts are powerful is one that reiterates the powerful persuasion of neoliberalism. By relating the ideological position to the “bettering” of the individual in society, it appears that educational reforms are intrinsically good. The "blind faith" Alvesson notes is present, I suggest, in ideals such as social justice, portrayed through mechanisms such as Widening Participation. I would argue that this is a form of commodity fetishism caused through the development of individual subjectivity formed through the creation of labour-power ascribed through the Knowledge Economy as belonging to the knowledge creators. In addition Alvesson describes what Higher Education signals to society: ‘Education as a signal system means that the ability...of the individual is indicated by their educational status. It is not the learning or the qualifications acquired that matter, but rather the completion of an education as a proxy for intellectual capacity’ (Alvesson, 2013, p. 79).

Alvesson (2013) [L2] writes from an Organisational and Management
perspective, but his assessment of how Higher Education has been more recently constructed is vitally important as it offers a way of viewing education that differs from the positions taken by many of the academics writing about the defence of a publicly funded Higher Education. Through the exploration of Illusion Tricks, Grandiosity and Zero-Sum Games, Alvesson’s theories enable the identification of commodified and subsequently fetishised characteristics of Higher Education and how this originates in a neoliberal agenda.

Alvesson (2013) [L2] identifies common principles of Educational Fundamentalism that help explore the impact of a neoliberalising of Higher Education and this is directly linked to the notion of a ‘knowledge society’ as the ‘good’ society. Alvesson highlights two principles in particular that clearly establish the relationship between Educational Fundamentalism and neoliberalism. One principle suggests: ‘Education and its expansion are crucial for economic growth. Greater investment in higher education has a clear payoff in terms of economic growth’ (p. 75). This, explored in Chapters One and Four, is a fundamental part of neoliberal ideology and has had a clear impact on developments in Higher Education. Another principle that Alvesson identifies: ‘Human beings can be formed – education institutions create the right kind of people’ (p. 76) reiterates the suggestion here that certain manifestations of Widening Participation are part of a neoliberal mechanism under the guise of Social Justice.

5.1.1 Economic and social understandings of knowledge

The notion of a ‘knowledge’ economy is a powerful tool of the neoliberal framework yet, as Powell and Snellman (2004, p. 199) [HEJA01] suggest, the understanding of what this Knowledge Economy actually is, is at best ‘hazy’. This instability in regards to what the Knowledge Economy is could be because of the contradictory concepts of knowledge and economy. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines a country with a knowledge-based economy as those 'which are directly based on the production, distribution and use of knowledge and information' (OECD, 1996, p. 7). [L1] There are, however, divergent understandings and critiques that derive an understanding from technologies based on knowledge, from the knowledge-based economy to the economy of knowledge production (Powell and
Snellman, 2004, p. 200). In other words, it is not just the use of knowledge to generate new technology for example, but the generation itself of the knowledge to create the new technology that neoliberalism seeks to promote. A more generalised definition of the Knowledge Economy is offered as the:

‘[P]roduction and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technological and scientific advance as well as equally rapid obsolescence. The key components of a Knowledge Economy include a greater reliance on intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources, combined with efforts to integrate improvements in every stage of the production process, from the R&D lab to the factory floor to the interface with customers...’ (Powell and Snellman, 2004, p. 201) [HEJA01].

This definition highlights the relationship between a use of the notion of knowledge and the speed at which this knowledge needs to be generated and consumed. It supports what Schoolman (1987) [HEJA02] had previously suggested regarding the short life cycle of products being created in response to market forces. This Knowledge Economy requires, however, a greater reliance on the intellectual capacities of its individuals and refocuses the development of mechanisms from the industrial to the academic equivalent.

Various critics have explored the notion of the Knowledge Economy and the knowledge society (see for example Srlin, 2006 [HESB09]; Kahin and Foray, 2006 [HESB10]; and Harding, Scott and Laskey, 2007 [HESB11]). Each provides a different perspective on the notion of the Knowledge Economy in relation to learning. These positions are summarised when Kahin and Foray (2006, p. 1) [HESB10] states:

‘The generation and management of new knowledge is linked to innovation, wealth creation, and economic growth’, however, it is problematic in ‘linking knowledge to economic growth... The value of knowledge can lie in its “infinite expansibility”—or in its novelty and enforced scarcity. The multifaceted and multivalent nature of knowledge makes it opaque— for academics and policymakers alike. There is too much to know about knowledge to be able to make intelligent decisions about it’.

The move towards understanding a Knowledge Economy emphasises a
causal relationship between producing new ideas, economic growth and subsequent wealth and these are foundational ideas within neoliberalism as an ideological construct. Kahin and Foray (2006) [HESB10] highlights the tension in the relationship between a Knowledge Economy and the creation of knowledge in an appropriated industrial manner: the value of knowledge is predicated in its apparent infinite availability and its intangibility. Importantly, the acquisition of knowledge and knowledge creation as economic drivers enable neoliberal policy to locate and appropriate the creators of this knowledge as producers of commodities. It is interesting to consider the idea of reliance on ‘intellectual capabilities’ that Powell and Snellman (2004) [HEJA01] identified as a currency to the ‘free society’ or ideas of freedom and equality as purported to be achievable through the neoliberal market construction. In particular this emphasises a reduction of knowledge as transferable within an exchange-value system that is part of the market model being introduced to Higher Education.

The relationship between what is knowledge within a neoliberal framework is unstable and this causes the unsettling of educational assumptions within a ‘Knowledge Economy’. The White Paper The Future of Higher Education (Great Britain. Department of Education and Skills, 2003) [WPP03], asserts that other leading economies invest more in their Higher Education than the UK (p4). Alvesson (2013, p. 77) [L2] reiterates the assumptions contained within this position when he states: ‘[t]he link between education and productivity is often presented as a causal relationship, almost a natural law. More investment in higher education means greater economic prosperity’.

The connection between economic investment education and productivity positions the idea of the ‘knowledge’ at the heart of the Knowledge Economy as problematic. In particular it indicates that an exchange-value is being created. Albert (2003) [HEJA03] explores the relationship between private sector (or “Big Business”) and the ‘knowledge’ creators within the Higher Education sector and describes it as a ‘pressure... to increase the socioeconomic usefulness of their research’ (p. 147). It is the government aim, continues Albert, to ‘enhance the economic ’edge' of the private sector and create more competitive economies’ (p. 148) through the scientific and technological developments made by researchers. The predominant idea that Albert explores here is the relationship between business and Higher Education and what influence this may have on...
the types of knowledge produced. In particular, corporate pressures that may be exerted and any subsequent transformation of types of knowledge produced are fundamental to Albert’s examination.

The knowledge society, distinct but related to the Knowledge Economy, functions as an ideal, one that emancipates people, ‘releasing creative potentials and relieving hopes and fears’ (Srlin, 2006, p. 20) [HESB09]. The issue of community is, as Srlin describes, the distinction between the knowledge society and Knowledge Economy. Society exposes the ‘ties that bind groups, individuals, and institutions together into a whole that is larger than the sum total of the parts’. In contrast, economy ‘is a subcategory of society, a limited prerequisite. If you put the defining emphasis on the economy you tend to shy away from the communitarian aspects of knowledge, the meaning of it all, and concentrate on outputs’ (Srlin, 2006, p. 21) [HESB09]. In many ways, it is possible to view the mass Higher Education system and specifically Widening Participation as an attempt to create a new society, one that perpetuates the Knowledge Economy, fulfilling a need for an ‘output’ to be the production of an improved society.

The idea of Educational Fundamentalism, and in particular the principles Alvesson (2013) [L2] identifies, is useful in relation to how Widening Participation is positioned in relation to Higher Education. Educational Fundamentalism, as a product of neoliberalism, functions conceptually in promoting what Močnik (1999, p. 118) identifies as the ‘symbolic efficacy of the generalised commodity-economy’ [L2]. By this, Močnik is referring to the notion that the market is self-regulating but refutes this through a series of analyses. In particular, Močnik (1999, p. 119) explores the double negative freedom position of the possessor of labour-power and states

‘the freedom from the ties of personal dependence and the freedom from the means of production. By the effect of this double separation, the possessor of labour-power becomes its proprietor. This means that s/he is constrained to sell it on the market, and also that, in the circuit of exchanges, s/he figures as any other agent of exchange, as any other proprietor of commodities’ (original italics).

Here, the possessor of labour-power becomes its proprietor and it becomes
compelled by the market forces to engage with the market as a seller and becomes part of the exchange system. Importantly, Močnik identifies the need for the agent of exchange to have their relation 'to the product-commodity mediated by the symbolic system of the commodity-world' (pp. 118-9) [L2]. The expression of Educational Fundamentalism can be seen as both a product of neoliberalism and as perpetrator of neoliberal mythologies about Higher Education is what forms the symbolic system of Higher Education. According to Močnik, however, this efficacy cannot 'secure, by itself, the ideological conditions of its reproduction’ (Ibid) without some form of intervention. Widening Participation functions symbolically as social justice within the neoliberal commodity-world. Higher Education then has to adapt to Tuition Fees, expansion directives and changes to funding that promote particular outputs from Higher Education that are the symbolic representations of the market model that can enable social justice. These become reduced and form a fundamentalism that seeks to promote the continuation of the market model of Higher Education.

5.1.2 Educational Fundamentalism as a perpetuator of neoliberal narratives of Higher Education

One of the characteristics of Educational Fundamentalism described by Alvesson (2013, p. 15) [L2] is Illusion Tricks. These are a ‘key manifestation of contemporary development...declining interest in ‘substance’ and a greater interest in conveying images and ideas that give the impression of something positive: progress, politically correct values, general rationality, and adaptive ability.’ Alvesson may be alluding to a movement that attempts to disempower ‘leftist’ approaches to inequalities. For Alvesson, an Illusion Trick is the appearance of affirmative action (i.e. political correctness) ‘produced to signal something definite, but are in a dubious or misleading relationship with something ‘substantive’ (practices, behaviours...)...They may just as well signal that the individual and others are ‘following along' to avoid feeling shame for having failed to comply with the norm’ (2013, p. 18). This notion of social compliance is of primary importance in how the various conceptual lenses are employed to give a foundation to the idea that Widening Participation is as much a part of neoliberal practice as the massification of Higher Education.
In addition to the notion of Illusion Tricks, Alvesson (2013, p. 8) [L2] also presents the idea of Grandiosity: ‘attempts to give yourself, your occupational group/organisation, or even the society in which you live, a positive –if somewhat superficial – well-polished and status-enhancing image’. Alvesson (p. 18) distinguishes between Illusion Tricks and Grandiosity as the former being ‘particularly successful when the people concerned are not particularly well informed and, at least in some quarters, the intentions may be good. They often involve some element of the deception of one’s self and others.’ This deception of course may not be intentional but the relationships between governance structures and individual agency are necessary sites for questioning to ensure that one is not merely complicit within a hegemonic discourse that has unrecognised implications on others.

It is possible to see the relationship between governmental Grandiosity and Illusion Tricks exemplified through recent sound bites delivered from the Treasury and the Education Department relating educational progression and social justice. For example the former Secretary for Education, Michael Gove, promising to ‘eradicate illiteracy and innumeracy’ as part of a pre-election drive to reposition the Conservative Party (Wintour, 2014) [WPJA37]. Michael Gove used these assertions to demonstrate a claim on improving social justice (reported in Wintour 2014, but not in the original transcript of the speech). This example demonstrates how a combination of Grandiose claims function as a framework through which the Illusion Trick of changes to Education more generally can occur. In turn, this, I suggest, perpetuates a narrative of Higher Education within the neoliberal context. This has implications in regards to the relationship between Higher Education and Widening Participation, in particular the way in which the perceived benefit of Higher Education is communicated through constructions of Widening Participation. To understand this, elements identified by Alvesson will be correlated with the construction of Higher Education.

5.2 Dynamics of a neoliberal agenda for Higher Education

Having established an understanding of neoliberalism and its relationship to a ‘Knowledge Economy’ it is now useful to understand the neoliberal impact on Higher Education as part of the move towards securing the Knowledge
Importantly, the relationship between knowledge as a social reality and knowledge as a cultural construction is very much at play within the arguments between a liberal understanding of learning and the instrumental skill acquisition form of learning most commonly ascribed to a neoliberal form of Higher Education. The role Higher Education plays within the contemporary neoliberal framework and how it may have arrived in this position are presented within literature as a predominantly negative occurrence, particularly in reducing Higher Education into a 21st century mode of production. In particular, the relationship between the state, a neoliberal agenda and Higher Education can be problematic due to the resulting Massification and Commodification. This is perceived to serve the interests of the neoliberal hegemony rather than the more traditionally liberal notion of learning that is more readily ascribed to Higher Education.

5.2.1 The conditioning of knowledge and the status of learners in the Knowledge Economy

HEIs have traditionally been identified with the ‘University’ but more recently have developed alternative contexts for provision including ‘HE in FE’ that sees Further Education Institutions providing local Higher Education programmes, ostensibly as part of the Widening Participation agenda. Giroux and Myrsiades (2001, p. 2) [HESB12] suggest the way in which HEIs construct their meaning can be located in having missions that ‘entail both the development of individuals and a contribution to public policy’. The increase in sites of Higher Education may be seen as a disruption to this role. Naidoo (2010) [HEJA04] suggests this can be located as inhabiting a Higher Education that imbibes a ‘master economic imaginary’ of the Knowledge Economy… a hegemonic discourse closely linked to the idea of global competiveness that frames political, intellectual and economic strategies as well as a wide range of government policies’ (pp. 67-8). Naidoo, here reinterpreting Jessop, Fairclough & Wodak (2008) [HESB13] suggests that the way in which HEIs are understood as culturally constructed sites indicates their position within a Knowledge Economy. This position is not just local or national but also has a role in the way global power is articulated through knowledge creation.

The hegemonic discourse contained within the understanding of Higher
Education as a part of a broader repositioning of how intellectual power is contained and controlled has had a significant impact on the way that learning and teaching within Higher Education is conceptualised. In particular, Jessop et al (2008) [HESB13] make this link to the development of intellectual strategies with institutional fields of knowledge, i.e. defining what subjects and disciplines should be promoted as most beneficial or profitable according to variable performance indicators controlled by a range of stakeholders.

The status of learners is also affected by the way in which intellectual power is contained, defined, articulated and created. In this way the purpose and style of the curriculum, pedagogy and the relationship between institution, tutors and learners then becomes: ‘rather than being cherished as a symbol of the future, youth are now seen as a threat to be feared and a problem to be contained’ (Giroux and Giroux, 2004, p. 218 [HESB14]). Here Giroux and Giroux are discussing ‘youth’ as something that is feared by dominant power. Reapplying this to the learner it is possible to understand the repositioning of students as a consumer of their education in a similar way: it contains them within a mode of production and alters the potential relationships between educational systems, learners and teachers.

Giroux and Giroux (2004) [HESB14]. describe the changes in the relationships between the learners, the teacher and the institution as part of a war on youth (p. 56) and educational practices as a normalising process. They continue (p. 219) that ‘students begin to look more like criminal suspects to be searched, tested, and observed, under the watchful eye of administrators, who appear less concerned with educating them than with containing their every move. Nurture, trust, and respect now give way to fear, disdain, and suspicion’. For Giroux and Giroux then, Higher Education becomes a way of producing carefully constructed social identities. These identities are those that will best serve the Knowledge Economy.

The normalisation process that Giroux and Giroux (2004) [HESB14]. is further explained by Naidoo (2010, p. 69) [HEJA04]. who describes this as:

‘[B]ursts of creativity in capitalist countries are followed by the routinization of work to enable profits to be made. Innovations are therefore translated into sets of routines that do not require the creativity and
independence of judgement that are often associated with the Knowledge Economy rhetoric...‘permission to think’ has only been given to a minority. The majority of knowledge workers are faced with routinization, surveillance and exploitation’.

There are clear resonances with Giroux and Giroux’s (2004) [HESB14] claim, but in addition, at the same point as the ‘youth’ are becoming conditioned, so too is knowledge. The Knowledge Economy, therefore only gives a certain minority the elevated position of thinking and contributing. This is disguised by the perception that the adaptation of the market model in Higher Education results in more choice in educational routes and therefore opens up the knowledge within Higher Education to more than before. This therefore, becomes part of the justification of a massification of Higher Education.

5.3 Widening Participation and its role in Educational Fundamentalism

Widening Participation has been described as both an act of social justice (Burke 2012) [WPSB03] and an act of marketing (Furedi, 2011) [HESB03] and this is seemingly contradictory. From one perspective Widening Participation is seen as a mechanism for enabling individuals to realise their potential in society under the guise of social justice. On the other, Widening Participation is seen as a cynical recruitment mechanism to shore-up the numbers of students an institution is able to admit onto their programmes. How to define Widening Participation to Higher Education and how to enact it is an intriguing question that would appear, at least on a first glance to be generally simple to explain, but is a complex socio-political construction that is troublesome. Foucault identifies the ‘[p]olymorphous cluster of correlations’ (1978, p. 13) that describes an ‘extradiscursive’ approach that is used here to examine ‘how cultural formations were made to appear ‘rational’ and ‘unified’, how particular discourses came to be formed, and what rules lay behind the process of formation’ (Olssen, 2005, p. 462) [L2]. In particular, this approach suggests that the two polar positions regarding Widening Participation as social justice and as an act of marketing could be concealing more nuanced interpretations. Identifying common characteristics in defining what Widening Participation is and how it is enacted must occur first.

Successful Widening Participation programmes and activities rely
predominantly on the notion of success in demonstrating suitability for candidature to Higher Education. Success is demonstrated through the achievement of grades as a process of accreditation and qualification (whether this comes in the teenage years or later in life). There is very little that recognises the changes in individual’s capacity for learning or engagement. Additionally, there is little alternative conceptualisation of success without some form of accreditation assigned to it. This is due to the linear way in which education pathways function that require a demonstration of prior success to indicate future success. This concern resonates with the work of Burke (2012) [WPSB03] and others, who challenge the notion of how singular access pathways reflect particularly normalised knowledge, which is packaged and used as success indicators. It is also a social and economic imperative ‘[E]ducation in relationship to the labour market has a strong positional element...you have to study for an increasingly long period to qualify for most occupations if you are not to fall behind. This involves avoiding a ‘low education’ status...' (Alvesson, 2013, p. 93) [L2]. This can be found reflected in recent political rhetoric, in particular the position taken by the former Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove under the guise of raising standards and aspirations for example Gove’s (Great Britain, Dept. of Education, 2013a) [L2] speech to the National College of Teaching and Leadership in April 2013 or the Department of Education policy Raising the achievement of disadvantaged children (Great Britain, Dept. of Education, 2013b) [L2]. The latter is an expression of Educational Fundamentalism that is difficult to critique because it is persuasive in its apparent commitment to equality and justice states: ‘We believe it is unacceptable for children’s success to be determined by their social circumstances. We intend to raise levels of achievement for all disadvantaged pupils and to close the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers’ (Ibid). Whilst this appears to be a simple assertion of the moral imperative relating to policy development and political positioning of school based education, how this manifests in the promotion of market models within Higher Education as the only way to achieve social justice is problematic. It is problematic precisely because markets do not function equitably and rely on the idea of competition, which implies something has to be better and more successful than something else.
5.3.1 Widening Participation as Educational Fundamentalism

To understand the role in which Widening Participation to Higher Education plays within a neoliberalisation of Higher Education, I will introduce two brief critiques of research that have focused on forms of Widening Participation. These will not be universally representative of research exploring Widening Participation but will allow for an exemplification of how Widening Participation can be described as exhibiting qualities of Educational Fundamentalism. I will, in particular highlight aspects that contribute to the notion of Grandiosity and Illusions Tricks that Alvesson (2013) [L2] proposed are two key elements that are employed to establish Educational Fundamentalism.

What Alvesson (2013) [L2] gives to this project is a framework to begin questioning some of the assumptions played out through social relations hidden through the commodity of Higher Education and expressed through social justice narratives. For example, Alvesson discusses the development of different ranking mechanisms for employers to judge the ability of those they employ. Alvesson suggests that a secondary filtering would occur whereby it would not be whether an individual has a Higher Education but from what institution or prestigious programme they graduated. This may already be in place with the differentiation between the research intensive institutions and others that are more teaching orientated. Alvesson continues to suggest that

'[t]he measure of justice presents problems for people who have embarked on ‘class journeys’ or for immigrants who wish to demonstrate their abilities via the education system. This means, paradoxically, that an expansion of education that is partially justified in terms of better opportunities for underprivileged groups, may make it more difficult for them to demonstrate their ability in the education system' (pp. 89-90).

The potential for an individual to demonstrate their progression as a result of the social justice argument becomes harder to demonstrate when more individuals are passing through it and employers are organising their sorting systems by further criteria. This educational ‘hyperinflation’ is now impacting on the drive to investigate progression to postgraduate programmes in England.

How an institution engages with Widening Participation depends very much on
the type of institution. The link between Widening Participation and the type of institution has been commented on by McCaig (2011) [WPSB06] who suggests that Widening Participation is utilised within marketing strategies of certain types of institutions. In particular McCaig signals a critique of what the OFFA agreements could actually be symbolically communicating about the 'market positionality among HEIs…' (p. 115). This is not only enacted through the positioning of Widening Participation departments as part of a bigger recruitment and marketing structure rather than diffuse activity throughout the institution. In addition, McCaig suggests that the 'state inventions by the Labour government introduced real financial incentives for all institutions not only to take WP seriously but also opened up the opportunity for WP to become part of institutional market positioning' (p. 119). The state interventions McCaig discusses relate to the introduction of student fees in the late 1990s, the increase to these fees in 2006/7 and the agreements entered into with OFFA as a result. In McCaig’s critique, it is possible to perceive this as what Alvesson (2013) [L2] describes as Grandiosity. Widening Participation, in this context has given institutions a different way of positioning themselves through their location within the Higher Education market and subsequent marketing strategies. Alvesson writes of Grandiosity in Higher Education ‘[i]t is hard to say to what extent many politicians and other supporters of education fundamentalism and the expansion of higher education are trapped by their own rhetoric and by verbose fantasies and wishful thinking about the beneficial effects of higher education…’ (p. 85).

Importantly for this discussion, McCaig (2011) [WPSB06] highlights a fundamental issue relating to the institutional approach to Widening Participation ‘the main focus of activities and under-represented groups targeted seems to be involvement with specific institutions rather than general aspiration-raising and thus exemplify the selling philosophy of institutional marketing’ (p. 124). This, McCaig argues, is a result of over complicated agreements of bursary pricing that actually limit consumer choice because the agreements have not been regulated sufficiently by OFFA to ensure effective competitive practices. Therefore, the market model that is supposed to be self-regulating appears to either be ineffective or not appropriately established.

The removal, however, of state support for Widening Participation exemplified
through the cessation of funding for *Aim Higher* programmes, which had funding stopped in 2011 (HEFCE, 2010) [WPGN02]. The removal of a visible and tangible financial support from the state to support this activity has shifted and would suggest that Widening Participation is not, as previously suggested, part of the present economic driver. Instead, it is possible to suggest that the shift is economic, in that it is the burden of financial responsibility on the organisation itself, not the state, to promote and fund Widening Participation activities. This would map onto the neoliberal development model much more closely than state funded access mechanisms and align with the increase of tuition fees.

This also functions in a way described by Lazzarato (2011) [L2] as part of the Debt Economy: ‘Debt is not only an economic mechanism, it is also a security-state technique of government aimed at reducing the uncertainty of the behaviour of the governed’ (pp. 45-6). Therefore Widening Participation, by promoting and developing pathways into Higher Education is also acting as a pathway to debt, both economic and social. ‘[A]ll financial innovations have but one sole purpose: possessing the future in advance by objectivizing it’ (p. 46). It is possible to conceptualise these examples as part of the ‘Debt Economy’, a feature of neoliberal Ideological control. Lazzarato argues that the Knowledge Economy is only ‘one type of activity, one site of power relations alongside multiple other activities and power relations. Indeed, it must submit to the imperatives of the debt economy (savage cuts in “cognitive” investments, in culture, education, public services, etc)’ (p. 50). For this study then, the replacement of funding streams with bureaucratic accountability processes and target setting with the generation of the Office of Fair Access (OFFA) and the growing powers of other agencies such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Office of Fair Trading (OFT) signals a shift in state responsibility for the access to Higher Education. It is argued here that neoliberal ideology has been promoted through a variety of development models since the 1970s and in the same period has been working towards a control of Higher Education and through its expansion and subsequent commodification.

The second example I will focus on is a combination of two pieces of research by Burke (2002, 2012) [WPSB02, WPSB03] that can be contextualised by the examination conducted by Gorard et al (2007) [WPSB05]. Taken together, they
provide examples of what could be described as Illusion Tricks and through this perpetuate neoliberal fetishisation about Widening Participation and Higher Education.

The nature of the research conducted exploring Widening Participation to Higher Education is varied in focus and quality. Gorard et al (2007) [WPSB05] argue ‘more research is needed before there can be general agreement among commentators and policy makers...It is not clear what the problem addressed by WP actually is, nor whether it is getting better or worse over time’ (p. 119). Widening Participation as a subject to be investigated and participants that are examined as part of these programmes are largely focused on normative practices i.e. the transformative effect of education on the positionality of the participant. So, for Gorard et al (2007) a key research question regarding Widening Participation to Higher Education should be more explicitly focused on deeply critiquing what Widening Participation is and who it is for. Here, it is possible to understand better the emerging trends that are highlighted in data (for example, applications).

In particular I believe this can be aligned with Alvesson's statement (2013, p. 23) [L2] that

‘[E]conomic development leads to an emphasis on positional goods and relative standing. This is very much about status and the ambition to be ahead of others – or at least not left behind. With escalating ambitions and expectations of above-average improvements, we get an explosion of signs of grandiosity – brands, titles, professionalization projects, and campaigns for visibility’ (pp. 23-4).

It is the campaign for visibility that Widening Participation contributes to on two points: first, the visibility of the institution in communities it may not have previously had any form of visibility in and secondly, making claims about the role in making visible (or heard) those who would not ordinarily consider Higher Education as a route for them.

Burke (2012, p. 177) [WPSB03] describes this neoliberalising effect as part of the ‘neoliberal framing of widening participation policy, and indeed education policy more generally, has worked to shift attention away from concerns with
social justice to a focus on employability, skills enhancement, entrepreneurialism and economic competitiveness, as well as to produce a realm of self-disciplining technologies’. Burke is calling for a re-conceptualisation of Widening Participation that is based upon principles of social justice. Similarly, Burke (2002) [WPSB02] had previously highlighted this relationship between social justice and Widening Participation in more general educational contexts. The post-structural approach adopted for Burke’s earlier study explored dominant discourse in Widening Participation within the context of a specific access to education programme.

In both of Burke’s publications (2002, [WPSB02] 2012 [WPSB03]) there is the link between oppressive political contexts and a concept of social justice established to critically analyse Widening Participation. It is, however, possible to suggest that if social justice has been appropriated by neoliberal ideology, social justice would also need reclaiming. Social justice in works such as Burke plays a part of an Illusion Trick. I suggest this is needed by a neoliberal Higher Education agenda in order to perpetuate its own narrative. By this, I suggest that what Alvesson (2013, p. 101) [L2] describes as ‘Higher Education as an illusion is then backed up by illusions within higher education institutions’ is occurring in Burke’s work. This is what Alvesson describes as ‘views [that] see people with a low level of education as appropriate targets for change efforts on the part of societal institutions. The problem with this discourse is not that it distorts truth but that it creates it’ (p. 114).

The implied message within many accounts of Widening Participation to Higher Education, I would argue, reinforce the notion that Alvesson (2013, p. 86) [L2] describes as being ‘ensnared by the education-fundamentalist message that you have nothing to contribute to a knowledge-intensive society unless you have a proper education.’ The examples that I have referred to here are based upon the premise that accessing Higher Education is good or a right. They question building from this premise and focus on how Widening Participation interventions may be more effective and how activities may be better designed or implemented. It is however, through the lens of Educational Fundamentalism that we start to perceive this assumption of Widening Participation as social good and potentially as the fetishistic expression of a neoliberal Higher
Education.

This is examined further in Chapter Six through a reading of notions of equality through the third critical lens of Rancière (1991) and the theory of Stultification. In particular the idea of interventional practices (e.g. that described by Burke, 2002 [WPSB02]) will be explored as acts of Stultification in a similar way to neoliberalisation of pedagogical practices that also exhibit characteristics of stultifying behaviour.

5.4 Conclusion

The relationship between Higher Education and Widening Participation can be perceived as being one that continues a fetishisation of their conceptual groundings within a neoliberal agenda. The presentation here of Educational Fundamentalism is as both a signifier of neoliberalism and a mechanism to enact a neoliberal education agenda. Foucault’s assertion regarding the creation of myths of humanisation and ideological polarities enable a lens to be developed that facilitates an attempt at drawing out Educational Fundamentalist characteristics within a construction of Higher Education. These narratives, I suggest here, are perpetuated through further constructions of Widening Participation and one of these characteristics is a compulsion for education to fulfil a certain role that contains a powerful dynamic.

Examples of how Widening Participation to Higher Education have been previously conceptualised and examined provide a suggestion of how Widening Participation has been constructed on an assumed premise of Social Justice and the right to a Higher Education. This has been constructed within the context of how Higher Education is perceived as part of a Knowledge Economy, This assumption has, I suggest, enabled an appropriation of this argument by the neoliberal educational agenda for its own use.

The following chapter will explore how both Commodity Fetishism of Higher Education and the Educational Fundamentalist characteristics of Widening Participation can engender a Stultification of an individual and the educational endeavour. In particular, the presentation of Higher Education as a route for social justice and how it becomes a practice of stultifying those individuals who
pass through it as a normalising 'right'.
Chapter Six:
Widening Participation to Higher Education as neoliberal Stultification

6. Introduction

The relationship between Widening Participation and neoliberalism has been explored through lenses of Commodity Fetishism and Educational Fundamentalism to understand potential hidden complexities of their dynamic relationship. This journey of conceptual critique has raised questions relating to how Widening Participation is constructed and how it relates to Higher Education as part of a neoliberal narrative of knowledge creation. To continue the examination of Widening Participation as an enactment of a neoliberal expression of social justice and of what Simons (2002, p. 46) describes as Foucault’s myth ‘of humanisation’, this chapter now examines how the notion of a ‘right’ to Higher Education is constructed through Widening Participation. This notion of ‘right’ is derived from the analysis of neoliberal ideology that attempts to democratise capitalism. To understand this ‘right’ is to engage with neoliberal understandings of learning and education processes and particularly a version of intellectual emancipation that pervades much neoliberal rhetoric.

To do this, I employ what Rancière (1991) presents as pedagogic Stultification, defined as an act that encourages an individual to act or look foolish and a central theme that runs throughout Rancière’s The Ignorant Schoolmaster (1991). This is the third critical lens to be applied to the topic and Lens Two literature is identified within this chapter as [L3]. This concept is applied here to mean a pedagogical act that can function in a politically influenced way to construct individuals who understand their Higher Education to symbolically represent their intellectual emancipation and appropriateness for future engagement with the 'Knowledge Economy'. They emerge, however, as constructed neoliberal subjects having been fooled into a suppressive pedagogical system by a neoliberal ideology. This approach establishes a way of conceptually engaging with the notion of intellectual emancipation within education through its suggestion that the appearance of pedagogy that is intended to function in an emancipatory way actually prevents it, either intentionally or through well meaning but un-critical accepting of socially
constucted assumptions. This is used here to explore the assumptions regarding how Widening Participation could be an act of Stultification, especially when contextualised by the concept of the Debt Economy. Through this, Higher Education can be critiqued to understand how the construction of a human right to Higher Education functions as an assumed 'good'. Here, the neoliberal discourse of social justice and how Widening Participation relates to Higher Education within this discourse further exposes how this ‘right’ has been used within neoliberal ideology.

To enable further analysis of this ‘right’ to Higher Education as a rationale for Widening Participation within a neoliberal context, I position Widening Participation and Higher Education as developing a neoliberal form of social relations. To establish a precedent in understanding approaches to assumed and unproblematic elements of social justice I refer to Brown’s (2006) [L3] critical approach to the concept of Tolerance. This critique establishes a precedent for the identification of politicised characteristics that become part of the discourse of ‘rights’. This then enables a way of understanding the neoliberal utilisation of Widening Participation to Higher Education as a way of making the market of the Knowledge Economy profitable. Ensuring this profitability invokes the development of a Debt Economy (Lazzarato, 2011) [L2 and 3 combined] not the Knowledge Economy more commonly expressed as rationale for the market model basis for contemporary Higher Education.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to:

1. Present Stultification as a result in the construction of Widening Participation through the fetishisation of Higher Education;

2. Examine the concept of Stultification as a tool in critically analysing Widening Participation to Higher Education;

3. To explore the link between Stultification and the notion of human rights as expressed through the ideological construction of Widening Participation;

6.1 Stultification as a concept of Learning

The use of Rancière’s (1991) [L3] exploration of educational domination,
equality and intellectual emancipation enables further exploration of what Foucault (1991) [L3] described as rules of ‘management, ethos, ethics and practice of self' that are preferable to ideological positioning. Rancière’s work questions educational assumptions. These, I suggest impact on the conceptual design of Widening Participation. These include the notions of cultural capital and habitus of Bourdieu for example, whereby Widening Participation serves to disrupt or investigate the habitus of groups of society. This approach was argued for by Minter (2006) [WPJA20] to fill an apparent a gap in Widening Participation theory and this idea resurfaces within the work of Burke (2012) [WPSB03]. However, the approach taken within this chapter is to identify the neoliberalising of Widening Participation as an educational principle through these critical lenses. It also complements Alvesson’s (2013) [L2] critique of Educational Fundamentalism in that Rancière does not start from an assumption of the innate “good” of Higher Education. Utilising what Rancière described as Stultification, three particularly interesting characteristics of Educational Fundamentalism are further understood: 1.) ‘Human beings can be formed - education and institutions create the right kind of people.’ 2) ‘Certain people may be defined as poorly educated. We should ensure that they can benefit from initiatives to remedy this negative situation’ (Alvesson, 2013, p.75) [L2]. Finally, 3) ‘Education is the solution to a great many problems, from unemployment to international competitive capability’ (p. 76).

Rancière (1991) [L3] presents the idea of Stultification as his identification of how learning is conceptualised and facilitated. This idea is exemplified by Rancière in the conceptual educator who is ‘the more efficacious because he is knowledgeable, enlightened, and of good faith. The more he knows, the more evident to him is the distance between his knowledge and the ignorance of the ignorant ones’ (p.7). Like Alvesson (2013), Rancière highlights this action of performing in ‘good faith’ linking potentially well meaning but misinformed actions that are serving some other purpose. This construction of a teacher is also part of what Rancière links to a more traditional understanding of how learning is facilitated and describes it as a myth. This is the myth of pedagogy, one that is ‘the parable of a world divided into knowing minds and ignorant ones...’ (p. 6) and that stultification arrives from ‘the principle of explication’ (p. 7). Rancière challenges the traditional constructions of the teacher who is
committed to providing a journey from novice, without knowledge, skill or understanding to competent, emancipated intellectuals. Rancière suggests that the Master-Apprentice model of teaching that was disavowed in much educational practice has been replaced by a practice that further reinforces a power dynamic, albeit in a different form, between student and teacher rather than equalise it. Importantly, this power dynamic is concealed within practices of superficial equality.

The reinforcing of power dynamics is suggested through the use of the word stultify as a translation of abrutir. According to the original translators note (Rancière 1991, p.7), it evokes the idea of 'numbing and deadening' and is rooted in the ‘mediating intelligence of the master that relays the printed intelligence of written words to the apprentice’s’ (p. 9). Rancière suggests that this mediating act in teaching is ‘pedagogical stultification’, that which imposes ‘imaginary distance’ between the teacher and the student that is never bridgeable. Stultification will occur ‘whenever one intelligence is subordinated to another’ (p. 13). This imaginary distance occurs when learning is understood to take place between those that know and those that do not and it then places emancipation as something to be worked towards, over time. Rancière proposes approaches that do not try to bridge an intellectual distance. Instead, the focus should be on engaging with the Will to intellectual emancipation not techniques that give the appearance of emancipation. Simply put, this focuses on how much an individual wishes to learn rather than how to make them learn better.

Rancière's position here is interesting because of the way in which it emphasises the motivation and interest of the individual and how a teacher engages with that rather than the teacher attempting to 'fill in' through pedagogical techniques the gaps in an individual's knowledge. This notion of distance between intellects also reflects the work of Watts (2006) [WPJA35]. Watts utilised Ricouer's golden rule of justice to identify a utilitarianism present in approaches to Widening Participation practice, research and conceptualisation and that to become an emancipated intellectual requires the individuals’ sacrifice of their own milieu. This was described sociologically by Alheit (1999, p. 71 quoted in Minter, 2006, p. 255) [WPJA02, WPJA20] who suggested ‘[T]hey come to realise that distinction is something beyond mere...
In Rancière’s work [L3], the relationship between the Will (to learn, to become emancipated) and intellectual domination is highlighted through the identification that the only way out of an oppressive structure is through what is provided by the oppressive structure itself. This, I suggest is that which Alvesson (2013, p. 18) [L2] articulates as Illusion Tricks, i.e. ‘conveying images and ideas that give the impression of something positive: progress, politically correct values, general rationality, and adaptive ability’. It emerges in Rancière’s [L3] idea, where "the dominated" posited as unable of themselves to emerge from their own modes of thinking and being which the system of domination has assigned to them. It ‘works’ by being transmitted from those who possess it to those who do not’ (Pelletier, 2009, p. 3) [L3]. This could be further understood as the generation of Human Capital, i.e. that which has an exchange-value within a market model. This is reiterated in Pelletier’s (2009) [L3] analysis of Rancière’s educational philosophy. In particular, Pelletier identifies traditional concepts of intellectual emancipation as knowledge transfer from the teacher to the student, which is the antithesis of Rancière’s position. Rancière’s position promotes an assumption of students’ ability to learn, rather than pedagogical practices that are constructed on an assumption of students' difficulty in learning. In addition the 'myth of pedagogy' that Rancière identifies can be linked with a neoliberal context. Pelletier describes this as ‘Emancipation, within such a scenario, is a question of knowledge: it is constituted by knowing the world in a way which transcends a subjective perspective rooted in the system of domination’ (Pelletier, 2009, p. 3) [L3]. In other words, intellectual emancipation is constructed through the power of the prevailing political paradigm. Rancière promotes subverting this through a greater understanding of the basis of social relations between learner and teacher rather than a transaction of knowledge via various pedagogical techniques that are generated through the wants of (in this case) a neoliberal ideology. This could have particular influence on understanding Widening Participation, in particular reiterating the social relations as a foundation within interventional activity rather than the types of knowledge needed to progress.

This oppressive form of intellectual emancipation is described by Pelletier
(2009, p. 7) [L3] as Rancière’s identification of

‘[A] temporal issue; the end-point of a process of gradual reduction in present inequality, as people become aware of how things really are. This therefore can present illusions of equality when an individual undergoes the correct form of knowledge acquisition to contribute to the Knowledge Economy. In opposition to this, Rancière’s argument is that there is no other means of achieving equality than to assume it, to affirm it, to have it as one’s epistemological starting point, and to then systematically verify it’ (Ibid).

Here, Pelletier articulates that Rancière is repositioning equality of intellectual emancipation as the equality needing to be assumed. The dominance of intellect that Rancière suggests is not necessarily a conscious act yet it is one of disciplinary power. Intellectual emancipation, for Rancière is maintained through the relationship between will and intelligence – emancipation occurs when intelligence obeys ‘only itself even while the will obeys another will...’ (1991, p. 13) [L3]. This, he later explains, is not an issue of ‘proving that all intelligence is equal. It’s seeing what can be done under that supposition’ (p. 46). Likewise, ‘equality is not given, nor is it claimed; it is practiced, it is verified’ (p. 137). Some of the normative assumptions made regarding Higher Education and Widening Participation position those participants by their identification as Widening Participation subjects through characteristics such as ethnicity, class or postcode.

This has further currency when linked back to the normative assumptions identified within a critique of Educational Fundamentalism. Alvesson (2013) [L2] invokes a Foucauldian approach in identifying the process of education ‘indicates normality...individuals adopt and subordinate themselves to the predominant standards for how people should be, think, and feel’ (p. 110). The importance of this, for Alvesson, is when Higher Education ‘functions as a broad norm’ with the result that an Educational Fundamentalism closes ‘major parts of the labour market...to people who do not have at least 12-15 years of school education...Formal education has monopolized what is regarded as legitimate entry to many, if not most, jobs apart from those with the lowest status’ (p. 111). This, for Alvesson, produces an inherent marginalization of the individual who is not ‘adapted to the school system...Hence, education fundamentalism is a
source of the problem that is defined as inadequate education, and simultaneously promises a solution for virtually all kinds of problems’ (p. 112).

Combining both Alvesson (2013) [L2] and Rancière (1991) [L3] would suggest then that alternative learning would not be demonstrated through the accumulation of skills, but through the emerging intellect that was able to exhibit the Will of their own intellectual growth. In other words, it is how the Will to intellectual growth is facilitated within a learning context not what is being learnt that becomes the focus of the teacher and the idea of intellectual growth as perpetuated through one intellects’ imposition on another is removed. This does not suggest that educators should ignore difference, but difference is a starting assumption. Intellectual emancipation that is focused on the Will to intellectual emancipation could produce a different environment through which individual’s engage with learning. It is here that I believe that future applications of this concept could look to notions of informal learning. This idea, importantly, does not signal a regression whereby discourse around deprivation or other political identifiers is removed. Instead, equality relating to these identifiers is not worked towards through a temporal journey of intellectual emancipation.

Through the lens of Stultification [L3] the concept of Widening Participation can be seen as a mode of production that reinforces a temporal notion of a continuing distance between those that know and those that do not. It impacts on the way in which we understand pedagogical activity that responds to the needs of a cohort demographic that is supposed to be ‘widened’. In reality, how much this cohort demographic has been widened is questionable. This can be applied in another way that also suggests that Widening Participation can be an act of Stultification. Lazzarato (2011) [L3] describes a temporal distance in the form of debt, which is promoted by the Debt Economy. If Widening Participation is promoting progression into a commodified Higher Education, it is also promoting the taking on of a debt that the individual must take on. This is generally rationalised through the argument of graduate premium, i.e. a graduate has higher earning potential through their Higher Education. This temporal power, however, is significant for a discussion on intellectual emancipation for, following Nietzsche, Lazzarato suggests that the taking on of a debt ‘allow capitalism to bridge the gap between present and future’ (p. 46). This enables the power relations to obtain the ‘future by objectivising it’.
Somewhat self-evidently, this is performed in current contexts through the burden of tuition fees a student must take on to achieve a Higher Education, and would be, according to Lazaretto’s idea, at the same time, succumbing to the burden of a temporal debt, the future. The rationale is that the loan ‘represents a generative process...money that generates money’ (p. 47). In this case, the money being generated is not on interest from the loan but from the apparent benefit or graduate premium. This is what Maskell and Robinson (2002, p. 8) [HESB15] describe as the Dearing effect:

'Dearing says...graduates benefit society as a whole, by earning more after tax and by paying more tax. But economists also suppose that graduates are not only more productive themselves but make the non-graduates around them...more productive too: in the phraseology of economics, there are beneficial ‘externalities’ or ‘spillovers’ to higher education, what a non-economist might think of as ‘crumbs’ (as in ‘from a rich man’s table’).

Here, Maskell and Robinson (2002) [HESB15] establish that the burden of debt is socially compounded by a moral imperative to benefit not only the individual but also more generally the individual’s context. An individual within neoliberal ideology can be persuaded that it is their right to take on this debt of Higher Education because the benefit to society outweighs the financial debt itself. It secures the future debt of the individual both financially and temporally within the Debt Economy that Lazzarato (2011) [L3] describes. Therefore, Widening Participation can be perceived in this way as an act of Stultification in that it promotes debt in exchange for social justice. The Stultification occurs through the distance between debt and social justice that is disguised within Neoliberal ideology through a promotion of an alternative being a drain on the state.

I now develop the notion of how Stultification can occur in both temporal and physical examples taken from concepts of Widening Participation. This is to draw out examples of how a seemingly positive act can be functioning as a form of oppression guised as intellectual emancipation.

6.2 Stultification and Widening Participation

It has been argued within this research that Widening Participation itself is an ideological construct and as such can never truly be knowable. Improving
access to Higher Education is seen as a positive with practical difficulties in terms of numbers and resources and identifying the ‘who’ should take part and would most benefit from intervention activity. Rhetoric surrounding the pathway into Higher Education, however, signals the ‘right’ of the individual to enter regardless of background. This ‘right’ aligns the movement with that of the ‘human right’ discourse and is therefore positioned carefully which makes it difficult to critique.

Higher Education as a commodity adds a value to the work force but within a discussion of equality, it functions metaphorically as a free market for those who want to ‘buy into’ the good society. If the individual chooses not to buy in then within neoliberalism, they have little commercial value in terms of ability to turn a profit unless they have an entrepreneurial flair. This is what Alvesson (2013, p.86) [L2] describes as part of the Educational Fundamentalism of neoliberal ideology in ‘you have nothing to contribute to a knowledge-intensive society unless you have a proper education’. A ‘proper’ education is one that supports the needs of the economy and produces economy-ready participants. This is further supported by an earlier suggestion by Apple (2001) [HEJA05] as being a no-win situation: an individual either conforms or be seen to oppose effort and merit, the products of an apparent natural and neutral position of neoliberalism. This is described by Alvesson (2013, p. 76) [L2] as the ideological advantage of the knowledge society: ‘no one can really advocate the opposite standpoint: an ignorance society’.

Alvesson (2013, p. 90) [L2] describes the result as ‘one ambition in many countries is to increase the number of students with a working-class background by means of an expansion of higher education. But this is not the same thing as access to attractive, well-paid, and influential jobs’. Yet a Higher Education is marketed as the key to accessing those jobs. The relationship between individual economic success (i.e. a job that provides and maintains an acceptable standard of living) and having a Higher Education could be seen as being the transaction or exchange-value expected in relation to the tuition fees students in England are now expected to pay for their Undergraduate programmes. Alvesson suggests

‘The measure of justice that may prevail in differentiation and ranking
based on level of education may be replaced by other, more arbitrary sorting mechanisms. This presents problems for people who have embarked on ‘class journeys’ or for immigrants who wish to demonstrate their abilities via the education system. This means, paradoxically, that an expansion of education that is partially justified in terms of better opportunities for underprivileged groups, may make it more difficult for them to demonstrate their ability in the education system’ (2013, pp. 89-90) [L2].

Marginalisation activities can be said to be reproduced through the development of Widening Participation as a mechanism for increasing the diversity of the Higher Education student demographic. Rancière [L3] was not thinking about Widening Participation when he wrote the following but it is pertinent as ‘an outcast is not a poor wretch of humanity; outcast is the name of those who are denied an identity in a given order of policy’ (Rancière, 1992, p. 61). Here, Rancière suggests ‘outcast’ is a politicised identity in relation to a given political order. In the case of this thesis, outcasts are those targeted by Widening Participation activities and also those who are absent from any research or activities. This would suggest that rather than focusing on pedagogical techniques that could be a form of reification, understanding the intellectual emancipation of the individual within Widening Participation could be better understood in future research in order to analyse it within a neoliberal framework.

This is particularly interesting in how Widening Participation subjects have been constructed within studies to enable an understanding of what it is to be a Widening Participation subject. For example, Bowl (2003) [WPSB01] co-constructed a project with participants on an adult education access programme. What was noticeable about this piece of research was how those who dropped out of the programme were recognised by their absence. Within this paradigm, there is a group in society that have not had the opportunity to engage with a process of intellectual emancipation either through choice (active absence) or by the lack of awareness of opportunity or capability (passive absence). These non-participants are absent from contexts where they can participate in the construction of their intellectual emancipation.

For Lazzarato (2011) [L3] this type of research would confirm the performance
of Widening Participation as part of the Debt Economy. In particular it is that

‘[T]he essence of wealth is subjective...[meaning] making available physical and intellectual capacities and time (labo[u]r time) in exchange for wages, but also the production of individual subjectivity...What is required, and cuts across the economy and modern-day society, is not knowledge but the injunction to become and economic “subject”...In the debt economy, to become human capital is to be part of the debtor relations that are understood as the archetypal relation of a capitalist society exhibited in the ‘entrepreneur of the self’ (p. 50).

This notion of the entrepreneur of the self ‘means assuming the costs as well as the risks of a flexible and financialized economy...through which neoliberal power governs the class struggle’ (Lazzarato, 2011, pp. 49-51) [L3]. If the individual has chosen to be absent from contexts where their identity can be shaped and conditioned into the right ‘fit’ for the Knowledge Economy then they are responsible for their own economic and intellectual hardship. Widening Participation then serves a function to alter the expectations and aspirations of individuals who had previously chosen not to partake. If they are unaware of the ways in which they can help shape their future through educational pathways, then Widening Participation helps promote this by engaging with educational and communication activities that raise awareness of opportunities. Both suggestions here promote an assumption of cost - either the cost of taking part in educational pathways (student fees) or the cost of not taking part (not benefiting from the graduate premium). Either way a debt is incurred both through a debt of studying or a debt to the state for subsidised living.

Maskell and Robinson (2002) [HESB15] identify this in their analysis of the breaking down of a barrier between education for intellectual development and that for vocational training in the early 1990s. This functioned to position the role of Higher Education as producing the ‘graduate wealth-creators that liberal education promised to supply...’ demanded previously by those such as Margaret Thatcher (p. 72). This was intended to force institutions to ‘justify itself on more intelligent and more honest grounds’ and has been described by Maskell and Robinson as resulting in the contrary (Ibid). They say that ‘if the challenge is made to show the return on the investment in universities, the
academics will give a simple and complete answer. What have we to show for all this money spent? Answer: ‘skills’(p. 74). Skills, then ‘obliterates the snobbish distinction between education and training...’ (Ibid).

A theoretical example of how this could be performed in Widening Participation practice relates to the delivery of Higher Education taster days where prospective students are taught how to look at prospectuses from different Higher Education providers. This kind of activity would provide a form of academic socialisation to educate those who may not be familiar with the academic marketing language. This has the appearance of enabling students from different cultural backgrounds and in particular those with no history of progression to Higher Education within their family to make better choices by understanding terminology used and advice on what to look for in these marketing documents. The notion that providing greater information and developing skills in reading prospectuses invokes the stultification act appears counter to what this activity is attempting to deliver. What it does, however, is not provide any form of intellectual elevation; it invites the individual to become familiar with the language of the institution and the admissions process. It is an acquisition of vocabulary and the successful acquisition of this particular skill could mean greater success in becoming a potential contributor to the Knowledge Economy through the creation of knowledge itself. Here, the ‘merit’ that will form the basis of the Human Right to access Higher Education is not a merit formed of intellectual endeavour; it is the demonstration of meeting the socio-cultural demands of the society, communicated through successful navigation of the examination and admissions systems.

Maskell and Robinson (2002, p. 75) [HESB15] suggest ‘A skill is a teachable way of doing a particular thing. Riding a bicycle is a skill...On the other hand, skill, as Frank Palmer says...cannot be stretched to ‘sense of wonder’ or ‘to adjust to different social contexts’ or ‘to accept responsibility’...’ Within the site of tension between skill and education, is where the concept of Stultification can be identified. In particular, what is being conveyed as education is the transference of skill sets that do not promote an engagement with an intellectual emancipation. This, according to Rancière’s (1993) [L3] idea is performing according to the Will of somebody else’s power. Not, as indicated by Maskell and Robinson, developing sophisticated ways in which to adapt to different
social experiences or even to up-skill individuals so they gain a ‘sense of wonder’. Of course there will be examples of this within education frameworks, but for Rancière, this is not problematic if the teacher is aware of how stultification occurs within the act of teaching.

Another example can be found in materials produced by HEFCE and the HEA in support of developing the Policy for Widening Participation (Great Britain. Dept. for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012) [WPP02]. This serves as an example of how these notions are reproduced in practice. In one of the Higher Education Outreach to Widen Participation Toolkits for Practitioners produced by the HEA (Dent, Garton, Hooley, Leonard, Marriott, and Moore 2014) [WPREE01], a standardised model of targeting (described as the ‘Birmingham and Solihull Model for selecting target learners for intensive activities’) is provided as an example of how to target potential Higher Education participants for participation in outreach activity. The instrument is built around three qualifying targeting criteria: A: Postcode area; Eligibility for Free School Meals; Receipt of the 16-19 Bursary; B: No Parental HE; National Statistics Socio-Economic Status; (with individuals needing to meet one from each of A and B) or C: Disabled; In Care (with individuals automatically targeted if they are categorised under C as a significantly underrepresented within Higher Education).

The reduction of targeting learners within such a tool kit is built upon two points: the first is the assumed good of progression to Higher Education. The second is the assumed good the impact of participation in Higher Education will have on the targeted individuals. The authors had previously qualified this approach to instrumentalism in targeting as ‘Ideally, learners are selected on an individual basis according to their unique personal circumstances; however this level of individualisation is not always practical’ (Dent, Garton et al, 2014, p. 4) [WPREE01]. This reiterates the idea of Higher Education as social engineering that Furedi (2011, p. 2) [HESB03] presented in his assessment of the marketisation of Higher Education. Furedi suggests the notion of selecting politicised identity elements as a preference over more critical questioning of the relationship between Higher Education and aspiration raising productivity of outreach practitioners. Likewise, Docherty (2011, p. 81) [HESB07] describes this as a political action and suggests the oppressiveness in something that
appears to be promoting some form of social justice:

‘The dialectic of inside and outside – with all its attendant ideologies of ‘widening access’ and the like – is but an aspect of managed space. It is not about the release of imagination into freedom that is constitutive of proper and genuine research; but, on the contrary, it is simply a way of restricting freedoms while merely pretending to enjoy them and to widen them.’

6.3 Stultification as a value in Higher Education

In a similar way that Marx (1990) [L1] appropriated the religious in his metaphor of the commodity fetish, where the fetish functions symbolically in representing the social relations between people through their exchange of and relations with commodities, the Stultification [L3] as social value here positions the fetish of Higher Education as representative of social relations. Here I adapt that which Marx appropriated in his identification of the fetish. Marx [L1] suggested that in primitive society the worshipping of an idolised representation of a god symbolically represented the relationship between an individual, society and the ontological grounding within of a belief system that assures the society that this God is controlling the crop and the weather. Marx suggested that this became transferred into the idolised worship of commodity within industrialised societies resulting in the fetish. In applying this to the context of Higher Education and Widening Participation, what becomes worshipped is an idolised form of knowledge that is then fetishised through various commodified outputs. These commodified outputs are reductions of what have been thought to be the value-added aspects of Higher Education. I suggest the fetish of Higher Education is a result of the neoliberal ideology. It functions as a value expressed through Widening Participation and the notion of the ‘right’ to Higher Education.

The value that contextualises Higher Education creates an objectification of knowledge, the institution that houses it and the individual that passes through it as part of a mass education system. This becomes known as the ‘right’ of the individual to access the gateway to the market, the route to a transformation in life. If this does not occur then an institution could be blamed for not providing ‘keys’ to the gateway through access routes, enough employable skills in the degree programme or developing entrepreneurial spirit in their graduates.

Earlier in this thesis, the exploration of Marx’s (1990) [L1] notion of the
Commodity Fetish was suggested as a particular way of understanding how Higher Education is constructed within a neoliberal context. Of particular interest was the transactional approach to Widening Participation and the role Higher Education plays within the neoliberal agenda by providing the site for labour exchange. This could be described as an ontological displacement, whereby Higher Education replaces one value system with another. In this case, there are two forms of displacement: The first occurs ideologically by disrupting social perceptions of Higher Education, such as the traditional notions of the Ivory Tower, the elitism of admission practices and the knowledge held within an institution. These perceptions, whether ‘true’ or not, have reinforced a somewhat negative view on the role of Higher Education in contemporary society as irrelevant, only for the few, and only for the rich. The transformation of the role of Higher Education as an enabler of social justice can be viewed positively, as the breaking down of barriers to education and to social mobility. Yet this preferred or ‘sanctioned’ activity can be the process through which the individual becomes validated, or acknowledged within neoliberal practice. The second form of ontological displacement occurs with the individual: through Widening Participation an individual is able to construct a different ontological basis for their subjective self; it is displacing the one that would be constructed through their social experiences and cultural habitus. Widening Participation then acts as a mechanism that promotes different values (i.e. Higher Education) and displaces prior ontological positions. Widening Participation conceptually functions as the bridge to navigate this ontological displacement and to generate a new cultural milieu. Whether that milieu is positive or negative in terms of the individual’s resultant experience is not examined but necessarily assumed to be positive because of the ultimate aim of entry into the Knowledge Economy.

6.3.1 Establishing values within Widening Participation discourse

There is within the discussion thus far, the idea that there is more of society that would benefit from a Higher Education than had previously been allowed to experience it. Widening Participation in this context can help the individual make more informed decisions about their choices. It is possible to reframe the empirically identifiable characteristics of those targeted by Widening Participation as a propagator of the absence of emancipation within that
practice. This is suggested through the identification of disparate bodies of people, targeted through Widening Participation activities that have had political identities created through the classification of distinguishing characteristics (ethnicity, class, postcode, for example). Brown (1995) [L3] explores, after Foucault, 'emancipatory or democratic political projects for the ways they problematically mirror the mechanisms and configurations of power of which they are an effect and which they purport to oppose' (p. 3). Of particular importance, Brown speaks of the politicised identity that 'emerges and obtains its unifying coherence through the politicisation of exclusion [and] form an ostensible universal, as a protest against exclusion...' (p. 65). Therefore, it becomes the notion of the politicised identity within Widening Participation that is of interest.

These politicised identities are constructed through empirical characteristics such as family income, ethnicity, disability, and postcode that are used as indicators of deprivation. This is part of an Enlightenment of the relationship between knowledge, society and economy. This 21st century Higher Education 'proletariat' becomes, paradoxically, a champion of the mechanism: if the market works to improve 'these' people’s lives through their acceptance into the market then it will improve the economy and, therefore, society. It also reinforces a hierarchy that continues to position those who have the observable characteristics of poverty and/or underrepresentation within Higher Education as requiring the necessary mechanisms to allow them to enter the market through Higher Education.

Higher Education comes to define an individual’s journey into the market: without it, the knowledge held within the Higher Educational Institution cannot be transmitted. This underpins a mythology of Higher Education within the neoliberal context and acts as a gateway that shapes participants in readiness for active participation. It comes to define them as active participants in the market and as such underpins the existence of the individual.

Widening Participation then, becomes an attempt to reconcile a neoliberal agenda with a moral imperative for a democratic education and social justice signified through equal access to Higher Education. It functions as a mechanism for neoliberalism under the guise of social justice but provides it
with the labour force that would perpetuate the market model. Access to Higher Education is not a ‘right’ of the individual but a ‘need’ of the neoliberal market model. This ‘right’ then gets translated through institutional and pedagogic performances into acts of Stultification in order for it to promote the Knowledge Economy of the ideology.

6.4 Higher Education as a ‘right’

Higher Education has been positioned as a ‘right’, and can be located as such within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1966) [RRSW09]. Under Article 26, it states: ‘Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit’. There are many examples of how this has been appropriated within a hegemonic neoliberalising of the Education agenda in England: Willetts (2014) [WPSP04] describes this implicitly when he talks about the ‘waste of talent’ that is the poor progression to Higher Education. A speech made by Michael Gove in his discussion for Primary Academies in January 2012 (Gove, 2012) [RRSW10] also evidenced this position where he claimed ‘[a]nyone who cares about social justice must want us to defeat these ideologues and liberate the next generation from a history of failure’.

In understanding Higher Education within the deployment of human rights, it is important to understand the political expression of these rights. Brown (2006, p. 4) [L3] suggests rights are the positioning of a ‘transcendent or universal concept, principle, doctrine, or virtue so that it can be considered instead as a political discourse and practice of governmentality that is historically and geographically variable in purpose, content, agents, and objects’. This assertion of authoritarianism within the notion of rights is important in relation to how neoliberal arguments are built upon this transcendent right. The general neoliberal argument in favour of developing a reliance on and development of a ‘knowledge’ economy suggest without it, the individual may otherwise have limited rights and be unable to access the ‘symmetries of knowledge’ (Kahin and Foray, 2006, pp. 4) or as Alvesson (2013, p. 88) [L2] would suggest as common argument for resourcing ‘people who have better than average qualifications receive a better than average return’.
When Higher Education is perceived as a site of political discourse the normalisation practices that depoliticises the inner workings of Higher Education and the identifies of those contained within it become apparent. Giroux, (2004, p. 107) [HESB16] identifies this when the market model becomes played out, the ‘dominant sites of pedagogy engage in diverse forms of pedagogical address to put into play a limited range of identities, ideologies, and subject positions that both reinforce neoliberal social relations and undermine the possibility for democratic politics’. It is possible to see this in other critiques of ‘rights’. Brown (2006) [L3] describes this in relation to tolerance: ‘[t]olerance of this sort does not simply address identity but abets in its production; it also abets in the conflation of culture with ethnicity or race and the conflation of belief or consciousness with phenotype. And it naturalizes as it depoliticizes these processes to render identity itself an object of tolerance’ (p. 13-14).

The relationship between Higher Education as a ‘right’ and Stultification is played out through the Educational Fundamentalism that Alvesson (2013) [L2] has described. The relationship between knowledge and agency within the neoliberal framework appears to be repackaged as a way of benefiting individuals and society according to their potential contribution to a Knowledge Economy. Yet education is always political according to Giroux (2004, p. 122) [HESB16] because it is connected to the acquisition of agency. However, it is what type of agency the individual is developing or acquiring that is called into question: the individual does not necessarily gain an emancipated agency through Higher Education because of the focus on output. In other words, if Higher Education is part of an Educational Fundamentalism that is a result of neoliberal practices, the emancipated agency of the individual (part of an assumed importance of what Higher Education is for) remerges within a knowledge economy.

An example of how this may manifest in critique is found in Docherty’s (2011) [HESB07] examination of the specific example of the modular construction of degree programmes. This goes someway to exemplify the processes constructed under the guise of enabling success but having an impact on the conceptualisation of knowledge: ‘The choice in question, and the resulting configuration of the degree, gives them the chance to express their specific identity, different from those around them, with learning ‘tailored’ to measure, as
opposed to being like a potentially ill-fitting ‘off-the-peg one-size-fits-all’ suit. In this, what is now released and celebrated, it is claimed, is the individuality of the student’ (p. 87). Within this statement, Docherty allows the reader to perceive a construction that is apparently enabling an individual to traverse and emerge from an intellectual journey of discovery where the individual themselves has control and ‘consumer power’ in their choice. Docherty does not accept this however, when he says

‘[t]he programme as a whole, and any sense of an intrinsic logic of its wholeness, no longer exists; and in its place, we have fragments of a whole that are assembled in idiosyncratic ways...No matter how long it might take, in intellectual and academic terms, for one to engage in a course of study of deconstruction, in administrative terms it must take precisely the prescribed computable number of hours...’ (pp. 87-8).

This, then, outlines an example of how the apparent equalising mechanism of modularising degree programmes actually reinforces the distance between student and teacher and also invokes Lazzarato’s (2013) [L3] notion of the entrepreneur of the self. This occurs through fragmentation, idiosyncratic combinations of module choices, and, importantly, the standardisation of units of knowledge, that are packaged within comparable divisions of time, space and outputs allocated to it and expected of it.

Higher Education as a ‘right’ excludes all notions of labour, even when rhetoric claims that all who are capable (although what capabilities actually are is another site of tension within this discourse) should be able to access a place of Higher Education. Rapley (2004) [HESB17] states ‘...it has become almost axiomatic that material inequality and political instability go together.’ However, it is at the end of economic growth when widened income distribution suddenly stops that causes greater discontentment to occur ‘causing the citizenry to feel that they were being short changed by their political leaders’ (p. 1). This resonates with the current economic climate of recession but also metaphorically with Higher Education in England – widened opportunities of access to Higher Education and the knowledge purportedly held within it along with rising discontentment (such as the fracture between students and teaching staff over strike action in 2014 discussed previously).
The apparent tensions creating a sense of disquiet and discontentment also supports the idea presented by Alvesson (2013, p. 5) [L2] who suggests that there is a ‘limited impact of growth on increased satisfaction’. Here, Alvesson suggests that the relationship between growth and satisfaction on a bigger scale is contrary to what satisfaction may be measured on an individual identification of the growth – satisfaction relationship. Alvesson uses the example of an individual who has a ‘protracted education career...to discover too late...that there are hundreds of other job applicants with the same education...’(p. 5-6). Deprivation, or the need for social improvement as an economic justification for increasing access to Higher Education can also be mirrored in the idea that Rapley (2004, p. 2) [HESB17] discusses regarding the definition of deprivation as the discrepancy between one’s own expectation of self value and the ‘value capabilities’. In other words, an individual’s perception of their own value is not matched by what value the market places on that individual, or if they cannot provide the skills that get a higher market value, deprivation occurs.

The relationship between what is expected in relation to what is gained in obtaining a Higher Education (or at least the rationale for its massification) again resonates with a contemporary positioning of Higher Education as the graduate unemployment rates indicate a sector with too few graduate level jobs. The 2013 Report on Graduate Labour Market (Office for National Statistics, 2013) [RRSWW11] however, suggests that recent (young) graduates who ‘lack labour market experience and are not likely to be on a clearly defined career path’ will have higher levels of unemployment than older graduates or older non-graduates, but have a lower rate of unemployment than young non-graduates (pp. 7-8). Finally, even in 2008 before the rise in tuition fees, the media were asking Does a Degree Guarantee you a Good Job? (Hilpern, 2008) [RRSW12]. This had been suggested by Rapley, (2004, p. 2) [HESB17] who discusses the ‘societal conditions that increase the average level or intensity of expectations without increasing capabilities increase the level of discontent. Among the general conditions that have such effects are the value gains of other groups and the promise of new opportunities’. As stated previously, it is possible that the zero-sum nature of this transaction is the root of tension and will become more strident as the market takes further hold on Higher Education.
The increasing expectations of what Higher Education is and how it performs are, I suggest, a correlative of a stultifying process. In particular, the focus on value for money in regards to tuition fees has become a distraction from the act of learning itself. This becomes an act of Stultification that then impacts on how individuals within Higher Education can engage with learning. The consumer model positions them as participants in the oppressive articulation of intellectual growth.

The neoliberal argument is founded upon the idea that the more knowledge that is created, the more stable the economy becomes and society has less risky individuals that could unbalance the progress made. The result is a ‘lack of sophistication in knowledge management’ and an individual who lacks ‘resources to assert or defend themselves’ (Kahin and Foray, 2006, p. 4) [HESB10]. Kahin continues to explore this by suggesting that this notion of neoliberalism doesn't question the finite limitations of an individual's capacity ‘Judicious avoidance of knowledge is not necessarily a bad thing. Human attention and absorptive capacity are scarce. Opportunity costs may be high’ (Kahin and Foray 2006, p. 5). What they suggest here, pre-empts the notion presented by Alvesson (2013, p. 88) [L2] in his critique of the assumption that

‘improvement in educational levels solves all kinds of problems…Even if we could reduce the differences in knowledge and education, people in a less advantageous position will be underdogs compared to those classed as average or superior. To the extent that basic knowledge determines pay and the risk of unemployment, they will be in an inferior position in these respects as well’ (Ibid).

Alvesson (2013) [L2] describes ‘the belief that the contemporary economy calls for a close to universal high level of knowledge and use of intellectual capacities’ (p73). He also indicates that the drive to raise the status through ‘university to all’ is a zero-sum game: ‘Raising someone else’s status involves, per definition, lowering someone else’s’ (p. 22). Alvesson writes: ‘Promising higher education for half the population – as is the case in many countries – and proclaiming that this is essential in a knowledge-intensive society, kindles fantasies and ambitions which, in most instances, are unlikely to be fulfilled. It also leads to serious quality problems’ (p. 75). Alvesson is describing a situation
in which Higher Education becomes a signifier of success, but the value of the sign and what is being signified here is being called into question. Likewise Giroux, (2004, p. 106) [HESB16] suggests similarly a public pedagogy, driven by the market discourse of neoliberalism that has an aim of producing ‘competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain’.

Brown (2006) [L3] suggests we find interesting (mis)understandings of how the social subject is created and identified and part of the success of the neoliberalism is its claim on equality and freedom. If, however, we understand the positioning of universal human rights as an expression of power within society, we can begin to correlate with notions of the fetishised commodity. Higher Education, as part of a narrative of reducing social inequality, perpetuates forms of opaque social relations that instead reinforce inequality. Giroux (2004) [HESB16] has questioned the ‘social subjects’ produced by educational practices; these are limited in their identities and reinforce neoliberal relations.

6.5 Conclusion

Stultification, an act that encourages an individual to act or look foolish, is a central theme that runs throughout Rancière’s The Ignorant Schoolmaster (1991) as he establishes a way of critically engaging with the notion of intellectual emancipation. This chapter contends that there is a practice of Stultification within the narratives of Higher Education that function as part of a neoliberal value system in the constructions of the benefits of Higher Education. One of these narratives is created through the relationship between Widening Participation and Higher Education and specifically the relationship between intellectual emancipation and social justice. It also, as a result, positions individuals within the Debt Economy. This is generated through a Commodity Fetishisation of what a Higher Education is and how it is ‘performed’. Likewise, Stultification, it is argued here, can be found to be a product of Educational Fundamentalism within Higher Education, the results of which manifest within the commodification process itself. The Widening Participation to Higher Education agenda proclaimed to be part of a social justice ‘programme’ could assist this commodification. Generated through a neoliberal discourse, this form
of social justice enacted through Widening Participation and Higher Education is then transformed from any emancipatory role it may be considered to play. Instead, the individual is subject to power dynamics that are performed through an Illusion Act. This Illusion Act constructs a narrative of Higher Education that promotes Widening Participation practices that position the individual as part of a neoliberal construction.

In addition, this act of Stultification results, as argued here, in the rhetoric of social justice being appropriated within the neoliberal framework. This act is again part of the construction of social identities that, it is argued here, are established in order to maintain a profitable market within a Knowledge Economy. This chapter suggests that some of the outcomes identified by Alvesson (2013) as characteristics of Educational Fundamentalism are caused by a Stultification within Higher Education and expressed through Widening Participation in order to fulfil a neoliberal educational agenda. This is, I suggest, part of the social power dynamic that occurs when marginalised identities are explored as elements of a political agenda.
Chapter Seven:
Discussion

7. Introduction
This concluding chapter draws together the critical lenses and observations to suggest how this may be used in my own practice and that of others. The constructed theoretical framework is articulated in its complete form to demonstrate it as a complex system, not as a simple causal relationship between Widening Participation, Higher Education and a neoliberal context. In particular, the theoretical framework is explored here considering the exit trajectory of this as a professional doctorate and the suggested implications for my own professional practice. Similarly, the field of Widening Participation and how this relates to Higher Education practitioners is considered. In particular, I ask whether professionals are caught in a position that is untenable or if there are ways to work towards an emancipatory practice and a transformation of Higher Education that is not necessarily neoliberal in ideological foundation. I shall outline how this theoretical framework and the research journey in developing this has impacted on my own professional practice and how I envisage some of the ideas being embodied within my own work.

This discussion also suggests ways in which this thesis has contributed to the discourse of Widening Participation and how this links to the commodification of Higher Education. These contributions include how Widening Participation is conceptualised and investigated as part of an ideological power dynamic and the positioning of Widening Participation in the commodification of Higher Education as part of a neoliberal ideology. Together the arguments presented here suggest an alternative way of perceiving how Widening Participation is conceptualised and presents a challenge to normative assumptions about its construction. In particular, it demonstrates that the relationship between neoliberalism and Higher Education can be explored as a series of complex, intersecting relationships not merely one of causal effect. By drawing out these relations, it positions Widening Participation as a transmitter of neoliberal relationships, translating social relations and notions of social justice into an ideologically driven mechanism of ‘humanisation’.
The purpose of this chapter is to:

- Draw together the themes of the thesis in the form of a theoretical framework and to understand its potential implication for utilisation within the broader field of Widening Participation research;
- Clearly outline the contribution to knowledge the thesis makes to Widening Participation and Public Higher Education discourse whilst also understanding the contribution it makes to my own professional practice;
- Suggest ways in which the framework could be employed in the future to develop the arguments presented here.

7.1 Summary of main theoretical positions

**Research Aim I:** The first aim of this study was to interrogate Widening Participation as a potential construction of neoliberalism. This suggests ways of perceiving Widening Participation as part of a neoliberal development of Higher Education.

**Research Aim II:** It was suggested that understanding the role of Widening Participation within the neoliberal Higher Education context could open other ways of understanding both the commodified Higher Education sector and Widening Participation.

**Research Aim III:** Interrogating the conceptual role of Widening Participation in relation to Higher Education practices and in particular how learners and educators interact within perceptions of Higher Education.

**Research Aim IV:** In order to make sense of the theoretical positions and in particular the intersections of different analyses, bringing them together to form a coherent framework enables the making of recommendations about the future of Widening Participation activity within Higher Education.

To understand how these aims have been met I now map out the entire critical framework that was established throughout this thesis.
7.2 The Conceptual Framework

The discourse surrounding the impact of a marketisation of Higher Education functions as an analysis between neoliberalism as the market model ideology and Higher Education (Fig. 3). This can be described as a normative, cause and effect relationship.

Figure 3. Neoliberalism and Higher Education

The underlying function of this increasingly observed relationship is to support the Knowledge Economy and ensure its future viability through the production of knowledge workers (Fig. 4). This is the relationship between neoliberalism and Higher Education in contributing to the Knowledge Economy.

Figure 4. Higher Education and Knowledge Economy
I suggested, however, that these relationships were not simple binary positions of a liberal Higher Education set against a neoliberal ideology and development model. Instead, I offered the suggestion that an examination of Widening Participation to Higher Education could expose further problematic relationships within and around Higher Education by examining it as a neoliberal construction.

The commodification of Higher Education has been linked with massification, increasing numbers of participants in Higher Education because it is Higher Education that is understood to be the site for knowledge production and the production of knowledge workers. The discourse here focuses on how Higher Education and in particular how teaching/research is being governed to ensure the production of future knowledge workers supporting the viability of the Knowledge Economy.

To ensure a constant supply of these participants, it was not only vital to increase participation, but to widen participation from non-traditional areas of society. (Fig. 5) In other words, it was important to guarantee pathways to Higher Education from under-represented areas of society to ensure there was sufficient numbers entering the Knowledge Economy as knowledge workers. The conceptualisation of Widening Participation to Higher Education functions within this, promoting a set of enabling relationships to provide more entrants to the production of knowledge workers. The relationship between Widening Participation as a supplier to the Knowledge Economy contributes to a bi-directional relationship between neoliberalism and Higher Education.
I suggested, however, that these relationships were not simple binary positions of a liberal Higher Education set against a neoliberal ideology and development model. Instead, I argued that an examination of Widening Participation to Higher Education could expose further problematic relationships within and around Higher Education by examining it as part of the neoliberal development model itself that has had a significant impact on changes to Higher Education.

It is contended here that as part of the commodification of Higher Education, Widening Participation functions as a mechanism that fetishises the social relations contained within Higher Education. This fetish is directly related to the relationship between Higher Education and neoliberal narratives of the usefulness of Higher Education. Impacting then on the development of teaching and pedagogy in Higher Education, social relations are not developed through interaction between people but the exchange value of Higher Education is reduced to commodity objects.

Widening Participation also creates a link between the rhetoric of social justice and the role of Higher Education. Over time this has become a neoliberal form
of justice that is indebted to the market model (Fig. 6).

Figure 6. Neoliberal Social Justice

To understand this better, in particular the relationship between social justice and the commodification of Higher Education, the lens of Commodity Fetishism was employed. This lens enables direct examination of the changing expressions of social relations in a commodified Higher Education (Fig. 7). Commodity Fetishism then can be found as a result of neoliberal expressions of social justice, reducing social relations of learning into the commodified outputs of Higher Education.
Within this complex system, Commodity Fetishism also appears as a producer of Educational Fundamentalism (Fig. 8). In other words, neoliberal ideology is translated through the fetishised commodities of Higher Education to produce a fundamentalist reduction of what Education is and the general benefit it has on society. The position of Educational Fundamentalism in relation to Commodity Fetishism is contextualised by neoliberal forms of social justice.
The mechanism in regards to the way in which teaching in Higher Education produces these commodified, fetishised fundamentalist outputs of Higher Education is through a process of Stultification (Fig. 9) This stultification repositions learning to be something that can only be achieved through the mastery of knowledge and importantly, the suppression of the will to learn through the imposition of a greater will. Rancière (1993) identifies that the gap in knowledge between learner and teacher is never bridgeable and therefore continues to perpetuate an inequality. Stultification has a role in developing commodified social relations in Widening Participation and Higher Education.
Figure 9. Stultification

This Stultification in Higher Education produces further reified pedagogical processes that serve not as a way for an individual to achieve intellectual emancipation but to be positioned within the Debt Economy. This is a power dynamic that the neoliberal ideology perpetuates through economic practices. The final part of this conceptualisation is the relationship between a Knowledge Economy and a Debt Economy. The latter is the result of the development of a neoliberal Knowledge Economy (Fig. 10).
The impact of a neoliberal agenda on UK Higher Education has been explored here through the articulation of Widening Participation as a mechanism that is part of the neoliberalised narrative of Higher Education. This narrative fetishises both Higher Education and positions Widening Participation as a fundamental component of a neoliberalisation of Higher Education in the UK.

When examined as a mode of production, borrowing Marx’s (1990) Commodity Fetishism, the conceptual foundation of Widening Participation can be seen as something other than what it is commonly understood to be. The normative view is one where Widening Participation is a mechanism that produces appropriate participants that can progress into a HEI. With different critical apparatus it then becomes possible to see these participants as future participants and contributors to a Knowledge Economy. This mechanism
transforms social relations inherent in a traditional Higher Education into commodified outputs of the learning experience and reproduced as reified concepts. These then function as neoliberal modes of production and underpin a value system located in a Knowledge Economy.

This thesis is not, however, intended to reject the body of work previously created under the scope of Widening Participation. Instead, this thesis sought to understand how Widening Participation could have functioned within the developing commodification of Higher Education. The discourse surrounding the commodification of Higher Education is reasonably well established but does not investigate how Widening Participation as a concept and as a mechanism would have had any role in the commodification process except for institutional expansion. Even then, it is assumed that this is the only way it impacts. As has been explored, it is much more complicated and ways of understanding these relationships needed to be put in place in order to investigate more closely any potential link between neoliberalism, commodified public Higher Education and Widening Participation. In particular, the disconnection between the claims and the reality of the process and experience within Widening Participation and Higher Education are important. Alvesson alludes to this construction when he states ‘The gap between the ideal and the reality is huge...’ (2013, p. 87).

The research presented here has focused on a critique of Widening Participation that fails to trouble the rationale of rightness and social justice. The emphasis within this discussion is now on exploring the potential for dynamic and bi-directional relationships between a conceptual critique of Widening Participation and the professional practice it could impact upon. As has been suggested, much Widening Participation activity is not subject specific and is, essentially, providing access to a curriculum that produces reified pedagogical practices. Critiques of this should also pose questions of how teaching staff might engage with change relating to the discourse of a commodified Higher Education and Widening Participation and what role, if any Widening Participation could have in this. Widening Participation could be part of a neoliberal discourse but articulated as resistance and resilience rather than compliance, following in some ways ideas such as Goodley’s (2005) concept of
resilience in the face of oppression. In this way, mechanisms of oppression can be transformed into concepts of resistance. Widening Participation in this way could be designed not to increase participation in Higher Education but to increase participation in social and cultural activities that may have additional properties to their impact, whilst at the same time impacting on Higher Education provision.

7.3 Recommendations for practice: Professional context and Arts Practice in Higher Education

I am Head of Learning Enhancement at a conservatoire that has practice-based Arts programmes including Music, Contemporary Dance and Musical Theatre. The conservatoire identifies itself within the Specialist Sector of Higher Education. Institutions that are considered part of the Specialist Sector, which traditionally have been focussed on high quality, vocational training, are usually defined as specialist ‘if the whole of its teaching falls within five or fewer subject areas’ (Ramsden, 2012, p. 12). These institutions have not been immune to the changes to the Higher Education sector over the past ten years and a Higher Education study from 2012 found that the number of institutions that would be described as specialist had fallen from 48 in 1994-5 to 34 in 2009-10 in spite of a number of new (including private) specialist organisations entering the sector (Ramsden, 2012, p.7).

My role within the institution is to lead on enhancement activities pertaining to learning and teaching as an Academic Developer, but also includes oversight of the VLE and Academic Staff Development. As such my role is wide-ranging and exists to support both tutors and the development of the learning environment. When I joined Trinity Laban in September 2012, I was incredibly pleased to find their Widening Participation activity taken seriously within the organisation. Keeping with the trajectory of this thesis, however, I do not believe that Arts based Widening Participation should be immune for critique and in particular how aspects of their practice may actually be embedding further neoliberal activity.

Here, I first explore the themes of this thesis in relation to artistic practice and arts education to explore how this work may explicitly relate to my professional
practice. To understand more explicitly how the ideas presented within this thesis may be tied into my subject context of the Arts and therefore applied to my own practice within the field of the Arts in Higher Education present examples of critique exploring Arts practice and neoliberalism. I then proceed to discuss the relationship between my understanding of Widening Participation and my role as an Arts-based Academic Developer.

7.3.1 Linking the thesis with Artistic practice and Arts Education

Critiques of arts practice are as multifarious as that of education. I have presented here examples of critique that explicitly examines the link between arts practice and Neoliberalism or socially engaged art, picking up the themes of this thesis. Jelinek (2013), in her critique of activism, art and education suggests that 'most contemporary art that claims a politics or ethics is so riddled with artistic and political cliché that it fails both as (interesting, innovative, important, ambitious) art and as effective activism, so that neoliberalism remains unchallenged as a form of totalising discourse' (p.3). Additionally, for Jelinek, there is a tension around the 'academicisation' of arts training, highlighting historical practices of becoming artist through practice rather than participation within an institutional setting (p.141). Although institutions such as ballet schools and conservatoires have existed for longer than the formal art school model being discussed here, educational art practices are founded upon the master/apprentice or artistic guru model. Additionally, arts schools and performance institutions were forced to undergo changes to the programmes of training to offer degrees rather than diplomas and other pathways of artistic training after the 1992 Higher Education Act. In particular Jelinek describes this as 'universtities have stepped in to maintain and normalise a process of standardisation. This process...within the artworld [is] a further aspect of encroaching neoliberalism' (p.141)

Harvie (2013) explicitly critiques the relationship between Art practice and Neoliberalism and uses the notion of creative entrepreneur as an example of how neoliberal terminology pervades the contemporary artistic practices. Harvie suggests that 'because the "artrepreneur" works privately for her own advantage, she models neoliberalism, the contemporary form of economic
practice that privileges the "liberty" of individuals to trade as they please...' (p.63). She continues to argue 'that artists are under pressure to capitulate to neoliberal capitalist risks of selfish individualism, destruction as an apparently necessary consequence of innovation and growth for growth's sake. However...artists are both highlighting and challenging such risks' (p.63). Arts practices that 'challenge both individualism and hierarchies of power' do so because, according to Harvie, 'neoliberalism does not command all structures, practices and subjectivities in contemporary art practice...art, theatre and performance are maintaining and advocating for models of collectivism, social collaboration and forms of egalitarianism, however complex and, sometimes, compromised those models and forms may be' (p.107).

What this means for the current debate is that structures of power can be effectively destabilised but not necessarily by using traditional modes of artistic subversion. This reiterates the work of Rancière that was written with the explicit rationale of addressing the ideas of intellectual emancipation within The Ignorant Schoolmaster (1993) in the context of artistic and theatrical spectacle. The Emancipated Spectator (2009) problematises how forms of critique that explicitly call consumption of art and aesthetic to account may be an actual part of the all overriding nature of capitalist consumption. In particular Rancière highlights a form of performance that further embeds a form of stultification that 'uses the blurring the boundaries and the confusion of roles to enhance the effect of the performance without questioning its principles' (p.21).

For Rancière, 'an emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators' and the artistic practice that produces this is that which 'does not amplify effects, but to problematize the cause-effect relationship itself and the set of presumptions that sustain the logic of stultification' (p.22). This is not produced through art that is predicated on presence, activity and community, these being built on an understanding of the effect of the spectacle as form of art that further stultifies the spectator through the knowing of the actor and the not knowing of the spectator. Instead Rancière suggests a practice that contrasts with 'the hybridisation of artistic means...constant exchange of roles
and identities' and 'that which relaunches the total artwork', both other ways in which Rancière understands the way in which 'artistic skills tend to leave their particular domain and swap places and powers' (p.21) and leads to stultification.

Jelinek (2013) articulates this notion when she detangles the overlap of activism, education and artistic practice:

'Art is not activism nor is it education. To imagine art practice in terms of either is to do a disservice to art, to activism and to education... some of the confusion may lie in an increasing emphasis on creativity in both education and activism and it is laudable that both activism and education are increasingly creative in their methodologies, but as every business person will tell you... capitalism too is creative' (p.142).

For Jelinek, the conflation of activism, education and artistic practice removes the uniqueness of potential contribution and 'misunderstands how disciplinarity operates' (Ibid.).

Neoliberalism has promoted the individualism through the notion of the entrepreneur but it has also required artists to ensure that there are socially responsible components to their practice, as demonstrated in Arts Council funding applications with the intention of 'cultivating institutional and/or personal development' (Harvie, 2013, p.75) or promoting the Wellbeing agenda, whereby Art practices are seen as therapeutic and serving a societal good. A paradox appears concerning the individual and the communal in art practice: 'art's focus is on the self or selves, and not the other, the mass or the multitude. To state that art practice begins with the self as distinct from activism or education is not to judge art ill, but to clarify inherent differences that go beyond knowledge set or methodology. Art enacts the individual negotiation with discourse, power, knowledge' (Jelinek, 2013, p.145). The focus of art practices is then, even within collaborative practices, the individual agency performed within power structures. When this is conflated with social activism or radical educational practice, what Rancière (2009) describes as 'the hyper-theatre that wants to transform representation into presence and passivity into activity' (p.22)
becomes performed.

Within workshop practice, a territory synonymous with arts based education, McMillan (2015) is aware of the 'teacher as sole authority of the teacher-student dichotomy' and as such tells participants that he is 'an artist and not a teacher' (p.80). Instead, an 'expert-intuitive practice' is searched for that seeks out myths that would otherwise 'paralyse their own creative potential' and destabilise them. This links, for McMillan to knowledge of self, one of the primary performative issues in arts educational contexts, partly because of how it can render the individual within the learning context vulnerable and resistant to the learning even if participating out of choice. This reiterates the queer approach to curriculum that asks teachers to understand their own response to resistance in learning. The workshop approach McMillan outlines positions the intuitive as expert making within the creative process. This enables artistic practice to present alternative opportunities and perspectives.

Jelinek (2013) reminds us that 'collaborative or participatory practice doesn't preclude the possibility of abuses of power or the replication of neoliberal values. Similarly, "subversive" graffiti art may reproduce sexist or racist mores, readily reproducing mainstream orthodoxies on which real inequalities are predicated' (p.5). This then questions the concept of socially engaged arts practice, whereby social inequalities could be reproduced through practices that are deemed to confront them. Socially engaged art is a 'resolutely imprecise' term, but refers to 'post-studio' and 'postdramatic practices' as Jackson (2011, p.13) identifies. This form of art practice 'gestures to the realm of the socio-political, recalling the activist and community-building ethic of socially engaged performance research' (ibid). Although this would seemingly contradict Jelinek's (2013) assertions, what Jackson (2011) highlights is the multifarious way socially engaged art practice can manifest: 'Whereas for many the word "social" signifies an interest in explicit forms of political change, for other contemporary artists it refers more to the aesthetic exploration of time, collectivity, and embodiment as medium and material' (p.14). Helguera (2011) suggests that 'socially engaged art functions by attaching itself to subjects and problems that normally belong to other disciplines, moving them into a space of ambiguity. It is this temporary snatching away of subjects into realm of art-making that brings new insights to a particular problem or condition and in turn makes it visible to
other disciplines' (p.5).

Importantly, all these critiques relate to the artistic discourse and narratives of the discipline. Jackson (2011) identifies that 'interdisciplinarity of experimental art-making cannot ignore the fact that artists are often "disciplined" by previous training' (p.13). Jelinek (2013, p.147) identifies this as the artist 'in dialogue with the past as they create artworks in the present for future audiences'. This is within the context of what Jelinek describes as the cliché of resistance 'we are powerless and so we use the only tactics available to us' with those who hold power utilising one set of normalised strategies and those without power employing a different set of normalised strategies (p.5). As Jelinek suggests this limiting of imagination impacts on disruptive and radical arts practices that 'fails to tackle ourselves as sites of both power and potential resistance, instead imagining that power always lies elsewhere...' (ibid). The implication here that ties back to the work produced within the thesis more generally, is that resistance to oppressive power structures that reproduce the dominant oppressive values do not undermine, problematise or critique those oppressive structures but merely reinforce them.

Hickey-Moody (2015) considers inclusive arts education from the perspective of Critical Disability Theory. Principles of practice are suggested that would decentralise, according to Hickey-Moody, the normative binary considerations of the dis/abled body in arts education and aesthetics:

'position disability and difference as an aesthetic source; develop student-centred, historically and contextually aware creative practices that let things grow sideways; be responsive to the power relationships that are established in relation to living with disability and try to invert and rework broader social injustices responding to these imbalances; reclaim spaces and re-signify tools of creative practice...let things move off centre when they are being aesthetically driven by artists with disability' (p.57).

From this position, the dis/abled spectrum is re-considered. The traditional able/disabled binary position is rejected and instead imagines artistic and educational practices that promotes the heterogeneous forms of art that Rancière promotes in critiquing the ubiquitous neoliberal hegemony.
7.3.2 Using Widening Participation as a lens for Arts based Academic Development

The development of my role in leading on Learning Enhancement is directly influenced in my understanding and interest in Widening Participation. I do not assume, however, that every teacher and academic has an interest or even an acceptance of the role that Widening Participation plays in contemporary Higher Education contexts (regardless of whether this thesis is arguing for or against the current provision of Widening Participation activity). In fact, quite the contrary, with much discourse around Widening Participation activity located in a ‘silos’ department that is centralised in an institution without sufficient communication networks to the academic departments. In many institutions Widening Participation or Outreach teams are located within Marketing and Recruitment Departments. This is not the case at Trinity Laban, which has dedicated teams within each Faculty and who develop subject specific approaches to Widening Participation. I would suggest the more common location of Widening Participation aligned with Marketing and Recruitment activities is part of the reason that it has been so easily used within the neoliberal agenda. Therefore, my discussion here is in regards to the implications of the theoretical framework outlined above upon my own role as an Academic Developer.

The way in which this could specifically impact on my practice is related to how the complex system can help outline how multi-directional dialogue between different parts of an institution needs to occur to generate new approaches to teaching activity. This multi-directional approach however, needs to adopt different critical lenses to ensure that dialogue has a critical integrity and is not merely accepting of paradigmatic trends of the moment. Specifically for my context, the way in which the Arts interplay with social relations offers a potential fertile ground for exploring this further. This is, however, not as simple as increasing participation in arts based activity though. For example, Sholette (2011, p.43) suggests that the communal aspect of artistic production is 'a typically devalued form of social labour within the culture of art since the greatest artistic value allegedly accrues to an individual author, painter, performer, actor...' but that business theorists, perhaps, perceive something 'inherently communal'. Sholette suggests an irony in the 'mining' of communal
artistic methods for that, which is apparently rejected in neoliberal individualism and is actually lauded by business leaders as 'near-miraculous models of "just-in-time creativity"'. Therefore, the adoption of these processes in education and business leads to the reification of arts based practices, both individual and community and reiterates the Jelinek's (2013) claim that power can be reproduced and continue to oppress even through seemingly egalitarian artistic practices. This suggests, therefore, that to apply my understanding of this within my professional practice will mean to confront the artistic practices themselves as part of the production of neoliberal Higher Education. I believe this will manifest in the way I work and strategise with educators to promote non-reified teaching contexts and social relations with learners that avoid stultifying pedagogies through art practices that reinforce what Rancière (2009) described as hyper-theatre. In particular, rather than relying on the 'lucky chance' discussions, the focus should be on how my position as a Senior Manager in a centralised role can facilitate and promote this dynamic.

Gosling’s (2009) account of the identity and positionality of Academic Development begins with a tracing of its evolution as a ‘Modernist project’ that possessed an ontological certainty that by improving teaching, students would learn more effectively (p. 2). This later developed into a more complex role that Gosling uses as a basis for posing questions relating to Academic Development having its own identity (p. 8). Fundamental questions Gosling locates as common in academia are the relationship between the developer and those they are ‘developing’ and whether ‘academic development is an activity not a professional role’ (p. 9).

Of particular interest in this thesis is the response from one of Gosling’s (2009) interviewees regarding the relationship between academics and academic developers:

‘...[I]t’s not seen as essential...our very existence as a profession is a standing reproach to all those teachers and all those heads of departments and course leaders because if they were doing their job extremely well, they feel, they wouldn’t need us’ (p. 10).

What this indicates is the suspicion and lack of credibility that academic developers have within an academic field and this is exacerbated by the lack of
good quality evidence-based activity and associated research. This is of fundamental importance as I reflect on my own professional practice and context. I extend this problem to reposition the question of how academic development can be used as a facilitator for the development of subject knowledge. Widening Participation activity could be used to create academic development models that are the result of a dynamic relationship rather than an accountability model, which is the one currently in place (i.e. OFFA and the responsibility of the institution to provide an access agreement and evidence of a Widening Participation strategy). This is of particular importance when academic development may itself be perceived of as a silo activity and not part of an academic platform accepted and embraced by academics and an institution.

To try to remove the potential for isolation there is an implication that a certain understanding of the subject is necessary. In my case, I have subject specific knowledge of the disciplines I work with and Widening Participation has become a lens through which I can problematise the subject itself. Of particular importance is the knowledge base of Widening Participation activity in a subject and how the subject is viewed and understood as Widening Participation activity. This activity highlights hegemonic practices of a subject that would be implicit in any Widening Participation activity (unless it is truly functioning as a recruitment mechanism, in which case it cannot act in developing the subject knowledge or discourse power of any subject except recruitment practices). So, fundamentally, I suggest that subject specific outreach work provide new ways of viewing and examining our subject. More specifically, Arts based outreach work could provide different ways of troubling the assumptions that have been outlined here. If we provide platforms for Widening Participation activity to become visible within its own subject area Widening Participation activity becomes reclaimed from neoliberal ideals. This ‘New Widening Participation’ could provide a platform through which the subject knowledge becomes repositioned. This would mean that rather than a commodified activity that is part of an industrial process of the economy knowledge to be ‘bought’ it becomes knowledge that is part of a socialised understanding of the subject. Through an arts perspective, it would recall what Helguera (2011) suggests socially engaged art to do, in that the work is ‘politically or socially motivated but
act through the representation of ideas of issues...The work does not control a social situation in an instrumental and strategic way in order to achieve a specific end' (pp.6-7). If Arts based Widening Participation was to focus on the representation of socially engaged issues, rather than the instrumental progression to Higher Education, a different outcome of activity could potentially be explored.

Moreover, the way of seeing Higher Education that I have presented here through the lens of Widening Participation could be applied in different, multifaceted ways. I now try to answer some of these issues in understanding where this research could be utilised in the future.

The conclusion of these exploration of how the ideas presented in this thesis start to interact with my involvement with Arts Practice and Arts Education suggest that Arts based Widening Participation need to be more exposed to their representational role rather than their communal role in improving society.

7.4 Areas for future research

To further contextualise how the work presented here may impact on my own professional practice, I describe the limitations of the research as three areas of activity that I can anticipate this research being usefully applied to, and specifically, what I intend to investigate as a post-doctoral academic. To contextualise these, I begin with a reflection on the literature searches conducted to generate the field within which this thesis has operated.

7.4.1 Reflection on research data set

The final criteria for the literature searches, identified within Chapter Three was:

1. The data needed to be focused on Widening Participation to Higher Education within UK and specifically England, therefore Widening Participation within other geographical contexts was not included;

2. The document may focus on activity not directly delivered within an Higher Education context (i.e. work in schools or in adult or community education such as Bowl, 2002) but should make links to progression into Higher Education (as Bowl's project does, making links to progression to Higher Education and contextualised within Widening Participation
3. The key words Widening Participation to Higher Education must appear within the text for scholarly texts;

4. Key words for popular articles or speeches should include either Widening Participation to Higher Education and/or Raising aspirations and/or social justice.

The criteria for collating literature pertaining to Widening Participation was developed through iterative database searches in the initial stages of the research process. Subsequent literature searches did not refine the search according to intersectional keywords (i.e. DISABILITY, GENDER, RACE). This combined with an alternative key word search of ACCESS or OUTREACH may have identified further literature, for example some of the literature that was included as amendments to this thesis post-viva and discussed in Chapter Two. Likewise, if these keywords had been combined with specific disciplines, other results may have been returned. No literature was returned with the use of the term Neoliberalism but other keywords relating to the theme of late capitalism may have resulted in further results. Some of the literature employed under criteria two related to specific projects in schools or adult education, but was not extensively sought out - there may be further literature available in this area that was not included. A representative sample of literature was included so project work in these contexts was incorporated within the discussion, but was not the focus of further more extensive searches. This may be more palpable if combined with the other keyword considerations noted previously.

Running searches in different databases using the same keywords and cross-referencing with existing bibliographies suggested that some of the literature I returned such as Watts' (2006) important philosophical treatment of sacrifice in relation to Widening Participation had not been explored in literature that was critiquing the nature of Widening Participation in current political climates (such as Burke 2013). Finally, the literature pertaining to Widening Participation was not collected in an attempt to be exhaustive. Instead literature was collected that would offer normative and dominant definitions of Widening Participation to Higher Education. The next step of this research would then to ascertain what
proportion of all research conducted exploring Widening Participation utilises a normative definition and scope, and how much of the research literature in some way offers radical of transgressive definitions and scope of Widening Participation.

7.4.2 Application of research in future contexts

Following the consideration of potential gaps in the literature base of the research conducted here, further limitations of the research presented here are identify for possible routes of research that link to my own professional context and the field of Widening Participation research. The three areas where I suggest the are:

1. Subject specific application of the framework into Arts based contexts. Most literature relating to Widening Participation examined here focused on generic interventional activity, except for a few examples of that drawn from the Professions such as Medicine and Teacher Education. To further understand the framework created here it would be pertinent to capture discipline-focused literature particularly within the performing arts subjects, as this is another gap within the field.

This also has implications for how I engage and interact with notions of Higher Education, particularly working within a specialist Arts-based context. Work in collaboration with a colleague exploring the potential for Specialist HEIs in the Arts as a site to interrogate traditional forms of Higher Education Leadership is a direct result of the research presented here. The framework that is presented here led me to identify the lack of engagement the Specialist institutions had with the broader debates relating to Higher Education. The specificity of the Arts would allow for further development of this framework and in particular the way in which the Arts trouble the phenomenological neoliberal constructions discussed here. The relationship between Widening Participation and Leadership has not been explored explicitly here, but the process of constructing the framework through the lens of Widening Participation has allowed me to articulate how I understand Higher Education to function. By applying the observations made here to
increasingly specific contexts, a development of the conceptual critique can occur.

2. A way of testing the framework more explicitly is to consider how a practical application of the framework in designing intervention activity could be undertaken. This intervention work would emphasise the need to trouble the normative discussions around progression and specifically to highlight the tension around progression into a Debt Economy as a claim for social justice. This has been a particularly impactful implication of my doctoral research as I have been elected co-convenor of the British Educational Research Association Social Justice Special Interest Group.

3. There are potential applications within the work I am conducting as part of my National Teaching Fellowship that is exploring transition into and out of Higher Education. The framework that is presented here enables me to understand my own position in relation to these concepts and to critically analyse them from the point of having already understood how I view Higher Education.

A further area that this work is already appearing to have some influence on is at the strategy level of my home institution. In collaboration with the Director with Executive Lead for Learning and Teaching (our equivalent to a Pro-Vice Chancellor for Learning and Teaching) we are working on the next iteration of the institutional Learning & Teaching Plan. Importantly, and as a direct result of the progression of my work here, there is a more critical position of normative assumptions and an attempt to remove as much managerial jargon as possible to ensure that the trajectory for Learning and Teaching is moral and ethical and based on significant conceptual criticality. To set this work up, the Director presented an overview of my thesis to the Board of Governors Annual Away Day in March 2015 alongside the work of a colleague who I have been mentoring and has critiqued their own teaching practice in relation the work I have presented here. This conceptual examination of the relationship between Widening Participation to Higher Education and neoliberal ideology opens up for me as an educational developer within the Arts an opportunity to investigate further the specific role of the Arts in social justice and public Higher Education.
7.5 Conclusions

This thesis has utilised Widening Participation itself as a critical tool as a way of examining Higher Education discourse, where previously it has been ignored or sweeping statements assuming its conceptual foundation have been the only form of critique. There are four areas in which this thesis has contributed to knowledge. This thesis has:

1. Positioned Widening Participation as part of the commodification of Higher Education;
2. Considered Widening Participation within the discourse of public Higher Education;
3. Critiqued the conceptualised basis of Widening Participation;
4. Created a framework using three different lenses to expose tensions within the relationship between neoliberalism and social justice expressed within Higher Education and Widening Participation;

This thesis has presented Widening Participation as part of the process of Higher Education commodification. This has been achieved through the promotion of social justice and the right of accessing Higher Education. When placed within a critique of neoliberal ideology and its form of social justice, links between it and the Debt Economy (Lazzarato 2011) can be found. In addition, the position of Widening Participation within this discourse relating to the commodification of Higher Education highlights the necessity for this debate to one of ethics rather than one of economics.

In the discourse of defending Higher Education against marketisation, Widening Participation is rarely mentioned. This is partly because it may have been implicit as part of this neoliberal ideology, but yet it has never been examined as such, from an ethical position. In addition, if Widening Participation can be examined as an expression of neoliberal social justice as has been argued here, it has had a direct impact on what the current discourse is trying to subvert, i.e. the future irreversibility of a private Higher Education system in England. This privatised system would be generated through the promotion of the role of Higher Education in the Knowledge Economy and the transference of tuition fees onto the individual student because they are the ones who benefit
The framework developed and outlined here describes the way in which a normative discourse (neoliberalism and its impact on Higher Education) can be opened up in different ways by exploring different aspects of its construction. By taking Widening Participation as a site of contestation itself, this thesis has been able to openly critique aspects of Higher Education that have been developed under the guise of improving the student experience that are a result of increased commodified expectations. Likewise, by unsettling assumptions about Widening Participation, it become possible to review how the adoption of Widening Participation policies and rhetoric of social justice performed through it have acted in embedding notions of neoliberalism in Higher Education.

The three different critical lenses, Commodity Fetish, Educational Fundamentalism and Stultification were chosen because of their troublesome qualities – they enable an irritation of assumptions that are portrayed as inherently 'good'. The qualities of each lens enabled different social relations to be revealed. Commodity Fetishism enables an establishing of the link between the marketisation of Higher Education and the outputs required of it from the perspective of concealed and ambiguous social relations. In identifying this, further examination of the social relations within the ideological foundations of neoliberalism can be identified as Educational Fundamentalism. This ideology allows ways of seeing the fetishised in Higher Education that have previously been concealed. It also has to have some form of production and the notion of Stultification allows for this mode of production to be identified because it is identifying how modes of emancipation themselves are actually a further mode of oppression as they continue to be the sanctioned method of a type of emancipation. This form of emancipation however, functions as to 'make foolish' those buying into this narrative as they are transcending into the Debt Economy, and the burden of future debt. The burden of future debt is a mechanism of social control.

Developing this framework suggests that a critique of Widening Participation is not merely a process of examining social inequality. Processes that are justified as rights or for the social "good" must be critiqued for hidden forms of power that serve to further embed temporal and economic forms of oppression, whilst
being conducted under the guise of promoting social mobility and social justice.
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## APPENDIX TWO

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