‘Right nutrition, right values’: the construction of food, youth and morality in the UK government 2010-2014

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical discourse analysis, situated within a broad Foucauldian framework, focusing on the construction of food and eating within the context of youth, schools and education, drawing on speeches, documents and public texts produced or sponsored by members of the UK Coalition government (2010-14). Michael Gove, the then Secretary of State for Education spoke of the ‘clear moral purpose’ (June 2011) of the education reform agenda, one key policy of which was the provision of free school meals for all infant school pupils from September 2014. Gove has said of this policy that ‘the reason that is so important is they won’t just get the right nutrition, they will get the right values’ (October 2013). The analysis draws on such statements, and other speeches, policy documents and public availably texts to delineate six discourses. These are the Discourses of: School (Attainment and Community), Health, Party Political Identity, "Manners Maketh Man", Economics and ‘Good Parent/ Bad Parent’. Within these, two overarching themes emerge: a tension between neoliberalism and liberal paternalism, and a link between meals and morality.

Keywords:

Food poverty, moral education, critical discourse analysis, free school meals

Introduction

In September 2014 one of the flagship policies of the Coalition government was implemented in English schools: the provision of universal free school meals for all children in Reception and Years 1 and 2. This move was the most high profile of the Coalition policies on school food, but it is by no means the only way in which food and eating within the school had been made a focus. In 2012 the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, commissioned two restaurateurs, Henry Dimbleby and John Vincent, to undertake an ‘independent’ review of school food, which resulted in *The School Food Plan*, published in July 2013. Cooking as a subject was also returned to the compulsory curriculum to age 14.

The high profile of free school meals, and the consequent proliferation of speeches and writings on this policy, make this a rich and fruitful area for research.

This paper explores the construction of food and eating in the context of youth, schools and education, drawing on speeches, documents and other publically available output from, or sponsored by, members of the UK Coalition Government between 2010 and 2014. Language and its use is a powerful way to construct social realities (Agha, 2007); exploring the language use of the powerful is a means of advocating for the less powerful, as critical (and sometimes political) approaches make visible previously hidden power relationships, with the intention to create results of practical relevance (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The analysis in this paper will show that food is a powerful object, constructed as the cause of and the solution to many problems; as such despite the strong state-led intervention on school food, the discourses below situate both problems and solutions within the realm of the individual, away from the responsibility of government.

Food in schools is never merely about nutrition (nor indeed in society more generally (Barthes, 1957)). The use of the percentage of 'FSM' pupils (those who receive free school meals because their family income is below a certain level) as a measure of deprivation in schools is both long-standing and controversial (Gorard, 2012). The potential of free school meals to create stigma around those who receive them has been a subject of academic work for over 30 years (e.g. Bissett & Cousins, 1982).But food in schools goes far beyond the free school meal or other simple considerations. In this paper we show that food is constructed as being able to do far more than fill a hungry stomach:

> The head boy was eating a breaded chicken cutlet in a white roll. The head girl had nothing but two Yorkshire puddings on her plate. When we talked to them about the benefits of a balanced diet – how the right kind of food could help them concentrate, boost their sporting performance or improve their skin – you could practically see the light bulbs switching on above their heads. These were clever children, but they had never previously thought of food as anything but a means to preventing hunger (or as a 'treat') (Dimbleby & Vincent, 2013, p. 18).

It is a certain kind of luxury to think of food as 'anything but a means to preventing hunger'. Food here is constructed as a beauty aid, a sports supplement – a way for pupils to improve themselves and their outcomes. Below we present data to show a multitude of other ways in which food is schools is constructed. The approach we have taken is a broadly

Foucauldian one, which considers what sort of objects and subjects are constructed by discourses, and the power relations which are revealed therein; who is given a voice, and whose voice is suppressed. In a Foucauldian framework, schools are about disciplining minds and bodies in order to create certain types of citizen subjects out of children: obedient, academic, self-governing, hard-working and well-behaved (Foucault, 1977).

We will first consider the position of food in schools within the research literature before discussing further our approach to Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, and then present the six key discourses which emerged: School (Attainment and Community), Health, Party Political Identity, Manners Maketh Man, Economic and 'Good Parent/ Bad Parent'.

Food in Schools

The literature reveals longstanding fears over food, health and morality, in the UK and elsewhere. Morrison (1996) notes that 'anxiety about *what, how* and *with whom* we eat has surfaced in relation to the health and physical well-being of adults and children and in cultural concerns about the disintegration of family life and values' (p. 650); in which family life is 'a symbol and seedbed for social solidarity and morality' (p. 649). It's a statement which still applies twenty years later.

Health is a morally-laden personal attribute (Paugh & Izqueirdo, 2009), and food, mediated through this, becomes an issue of morality too. Karrebæk (2014) in her ethnolinguistic study of a Danish classroom noted that food items were assigned to both social categories and moral judgement; food that was 'healthy' was also 'good'. Food practices therefore became 'indexically linked to social models such as 'the good student', 'the incompetent minority child', 'the good Muslim'' (p. 19). Both Harman and Cappellini (2015) and Allison (1991) found that lunchboxes could be a means by which mothers demonstrated that they were 'good' mothers, with the school as audience. A tension also appears in Harman and Cappellini between the parents' belief in their rights to choose for their child, and their desire to appear good to the school, which frequently enforced spot checks to ensure packed lunches were adhering to school rules. In their data, which was drawn from a sample of relatively high income mothers, opting for a packed lunch over a school meal was 'framed as a matter of parental care' which 'contrasts with the portrayal of mothers in *Jamie's Return to School Dinners* (Channel 4, 2006) where packed lunches were equated with a lack of caring' (2015, p. 768). For some of their sample, this was clearly a

class-related distinction, which rejected convenience foods (a symbol of bad mothering) in favour of healthy eating. 'Mothers who gave their children junk food became a powerful image that mothers in our sample worked to distance themselves from' (2015, p. 772). In Karrebæk's (2014) study, 'health was continuously emphasized by the teachers as a moral guiding principle for what to eat' (p.31). Food and food practices thus become signifiers of class and of moral choices and identities.

School food can be deployed as a means to fix problems, and specifically to support social reform. Sweden introduced universal free school meals for the ten years of compulsory schooling in the 1930s, 'when the Swedish compulsory school transformed from an education platform into an arena for social reforms' (Gullberg, 2006, p. 339). These reforms were designed to address the 'threats' of a decreasing population, which was linked to 'among other things, bad eating habits and bad housekeeping. In other words, Swedish families had to learn how to shop, cook and eat properly' (p. 340). The concerns are familiar from the current UK context, although for different reasons. It is perhaps not reassuring that a recent study of perceptions of the free school meal in Sweden found that most people regard it as a 'second-class' meal, lacking in the vegetables that would make it ideal (Osowski, Göranzon & Fjellström, 2010). It is, however, interesting to note that participants in that study also saw the free school meal as a highly significant symbol of universal national welfare. School meals are figured as learning opportunities in particular in Swedish literature (Sepp, Abrahamsson & Fjellström, 2006; Osowski, Göranzon & Fjellström, 2010; Benn and Carlsson, 2014). Teachers have a role in socialising, in countering neophobia and in discussing healthy eating. The impact of sweeping changes is not always as expected, however: Andersen, Holm and Baarts (2015) introduced a hot communal school meal in an intervention study, compared to the normal Danish arrangements of individual packed lunches. 'The results fail to confirm the conventional view that shared meals have greater social impacts and benefits than eating individualised foods' (p. 394). The authors conclude that they did not give sufficient thought to the social aspects of the intervention, in particular noting the potential for separating out and labelling ethnic minority children, of which more below. They also speculated that the social entrepreneurship inherent in the exchange system generated around packed lunches might outweigh the benefits of shared meals where everyone eats the same meal.

Teaching about food and nutrition, and the labelling of children in relation to school meals, is felt to be of particular difficulty in the studies of food in school, particularly in relation to ethnic minorities. In Denmark, for example, pork is promoted as exceptionally healthy but also as a national food; the inability of Muslim children to partake of it inhibited their being perceived as being integrated into Danish society (Karrebæk, 2014). Burgess and Morrison (1998) identified reluctance among staff 'to get involved in "sensitive" issues of culturally diverse eating patterns and contrasting levels of parental income' (p. 142) when teaching about healthy food, particularly in the context of a lack of knowledge of what non-Western students ate at home. (The same study also noted the segregation of children in dining hall queues and seating depending on their eating preferences.) In another article drawn from the same data, Morrison (1996) notes further insensitivities around ethnicity in relation to school food: Indian children, for example, might be given Indian food, when for some the opportunity to eat something different at lunch was a benefit, or the school version was a pale and inedible imitation of their home cuisine. We suspect that twenty years of increasing multi-culturalism in the British diet will have done much to disperse some of these difficulties, but it illustrates some of the tensions around ethnicity and school food, or other categories, such as 'vegetarian' (and the mis-labelling of students from some religious backgrounds as vegetarian because of restrictions on certain meats (e.g. Andersen, Holm & Baarts, 2015)).

Other challenges to the 'rightness' of school meals relate to issues of control. Although the studies of packed lunches discussed above noted the elements of choice and control children negotiated with parents in choosing food items, Morrison (1996) notes the control element exercised by dinner ladies, in particular around 'eating up' and eating speed. This was linked to morality by some of their participants: children who ate free school meals should eat up because 'other people's taxes' paid for them; those whose parents paid had to eat up because of 'dinner ladies' interpretations of parental expectations, and a view that to waste food and money was wrong' (p. 660). Some have suggested that there is an ethical position that children should be allowed a period of freedom from the strictures of the school day, rather than the school lunch period being one in which further control is exercised (Benn and Carlsson, 2014). Others have noted the potential for children to begin to develop themselves as social agents and consumers, when food items at school form the basis of social exchange, such as the bartering culture

identified by Burgess and Morrison (1998). Mothers in various studies admitted that the exchange value of items was one of things which influenced what went into packed lunches, with the full knowledge that their children would trade them at school (Morrison, 1996; Harman & Cappellini, 2015); their children were 'recognised as competent consumers' (Harman & Cappellini, 2015, p. 775). For many researchers children and teenagers made decisions about food not only in the light of their knowledge of healthy and unhealthy eating, and what their parents or schools would want, but also in terms of other constraints, such as lack of time or peer-related pressure (e.g. Croll, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2001). Thus students become agents within a complex network of competing pressures, who will not necessarily be easily manipulated into the 'right' ways of eating.

Particularly in the US, the work of behavioural economists has been brought to bear on the problem of school foods, encouraging students into desirable behaviours through incentives. French (2003), for example, reports a study in which lowering the price of 'targeted' foods relative to undesirable foods (where conversely, fat and sugar usually provide dietary energy at very low cost) led to a significant rise in the consumption of healthy foods which was robust across populations. Just *et al.* (2008) showed that financial considerations are not the only ones which make a change: altering at what point in the school cafeteria students chose their meals, or the means by which they could pay for them both had an impact on food choice which could be manipulated to stimulate healthy food choices. It is possible to see in the literature, therefore, both concerns with health and with economics in relation to school food, and a move towards using manipulation of food in schools to change behaviour and outcomes outside it.

Method

The data on which this analysis is based is wide-ranging. A search was conducted through the gov.uk website for items containing the words 'food' and 'schools', or 'school meals' etc. (*The School Food Plan* was linked to through gov.uk although it is hosted on its own website.) These items, which constitute the data, include press releases and reports of various kinds. We also traced newspaper articles written by ministers which were not reproduced in full on the gov.uk website. A hand search was also conducted of the speeches given by Michael Gove, dating from the Conservative party conference before the UK General Election in 2010, to the end of his time in office as the Secretary of State for

Education, and those given by the various schools ministers between the formation of the Coalition government in May 2010 and the end of September 2014, the month in which the universal free school meal policy was implemented. In addition the transcripts of 'Call Clegg', a weekly radio slot in which the Deputy Prime Minister took part, were searched for references to food in school; these, along with speeches given by Mr Clegg which were relevant, were incorporated into the analysis. (Mr Clegg positioned universal free school meals as a key policy personally and politically for the Liberal Democrats.) This data encompasses the discussions leading up to the implementation of universal free school meals, and their launch in schools; the end point is both an appropriate and a convenient one. The range of data reflects the myriad of documents and utterances through which governments and individuals within governments communicate.

Our epistemological starting place was the notion that power is constituted through discourse and is implicated in what is constructed as knowledge (Foucault, 1990). However, we wished to avoid a position that was concerned only with the structure of language at the expense of an analysis of what that language does to people. We therefore followed Parker (1992) by taking a critical realist Foucauldian position which allowed us to discuss 'real things' (p.25) such as hunger and inequality in a context of the power/knowledge dynamic enacted, maintained and challenged within and between discourses. Foucauldian views of discourse realise its dialectic material and semiotic position (Fairclough, 2012); 'this goes beyond attention to signs and meaning in language to embrace its effects in the social world' (Doherty, 2007). A discourse in this sense is 'a system of statements which cohere around common meanings and values' (Hollway, 1983, p. 131).

We offer the 'customary disclaimer' (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 91) that there are not set rules or procedures for conducting Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. This is partly to avoid suggesting there is a neutral scientific method that is capable of unveiling an 'objective truth' (Graham, 2005), and partly in imitation of Foucault himself (Hore, 2014), in claiming "I take care not to dictate how things should be" (Foucault, 1994, p. 288). Nevertheless, there are some principles which can be agreed, and which we have followed: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis typical involves some kind of historical enquiry, 'analysis attends to mechanisms of *power*' and it is directed to the making up of subjects through material and signifying practices (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 91). In particular we have considered the function of statements in discourses that work to (re) produce

dominant power relations (Nakayama & Krizek, 1995), looking to statements 'not so much for what they say but what they *do*' (Graham, 2011).

Our initial analysis therefore involved independently identifying particular discursive objects: 'the things which food in schools is constructed as being able to do' before comparing the two sets of objects. This is different from simply identifying themes in the data, in that it positions food as a tool within the power relationships considered by Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. When these things had been listed, and refined into a single list, we considered different ways of grouping them, and the discourses which constructed them. The discourses are identified below. Discourses in this sense are interrelational, and intertextual (Wodak & Meyer, 2001); that is, they are bigger than individual texts or speakers. All data was considered by both researchers. It is inevitable in Foucauldian Discourse Analysis that the data can be presented in more than one way, as 'analysis is always interpretive, always contingent, always a version or a reading from some theoretical, epistemological or ethical standpoint' (Wetherell, 2001, p. 384). The groupings into discourses in the Analysis section below are one potential set of groupings, which seemed to us to be the most useful way to consider the data. We tried several different groupings in the process of data analysis, but found these most useful in terms of coverage of the data and in terms of our Foucauldian intent to critique power relationships within the construction of food. They also align with many of the concerns and themes discussed in the previous literature which was discussed above, which is one element in their favour. However, the fact that different groupings may be made shows the influence which the identity of the researchers has on this kind of research. At all stages we considered our own relationship with the data and its topics, and reflected on the influence of that on the research.

Analysis

We identified six main discourses within the data, namely: School (Attainment and Community); Health; Party Political Identity; 'Manners Maketh Man'; Economic; and a sixth, 'Good Parent/ Bad Parent'. Working its way between, above and throughout these discourses was also a clear tension between neoliberalism and liberal paternalism, in which practices within a liberal paternal framework were clothed, sometimes uncomfortably, in

the language of neoliberalism. We will refer to and consider this tension throughout the following analysis. Through the analysis a second theme emerges: that of morality.

School: Attainment and Community

It is unsurprising that 'School' was a main discourse in a study of the construction of food and eating within the context of youth and education by members of the UK government. This discourse constructs a world of teachers, headteachers and pupils, of grades, behaviour and ethos. 'School' in the data has two significant aspects: attainment and community.

School attainment is a discourse in which evidence has weight: texts refer to 'many studies' linking nourishment to attainment (Dimblebly & Vincent, 2013, p. 8), and to pilot projects in which 'students were found to be on average 2 months ahead of their peers elsewhere' (Deputy Prime Minster's Office, 2013). In the data school food has the power to improve academic performance, to improve behaviour, to make children more energetic and to make them better able to concentrate. This is the least controversial claim for us, in that these potential effects have been seen in a variety of empirical studies.

Food is also constructed as having the power to create a unified school community, or otherwise. Commensality – the act of eating together – is widely agreed to be a key principle underlying society (e.g. Morrison, 1996) and it is implied in the data to be so in school settings also. It is most notable in its inverse: free school meal eligibility creates a signal of poverty, with consequent potential stigma, and therefore division of school communities (much like the tensions around ethnicity seen in the literature). In addition the content of packed lunches has the capacity to demonstrate the haves and the have-nots, when 'children magic hot three-course dinners out of their lunch boxes, to the envy of their friends' (Dimbleby & Vincent, 2013, p.48). This reflects the findings of Harman and Cappellini (2015) that packed lunches have the potential to be classed in their contents: a signal which can be read by other children as well as teachers.

The discourse of School, and Attainment in particular, is linked to the traditional Foucauldian critique of schools: within this discourse food in schools is about creating well-ordered, well-behaved children, thus enabling them in their mission to reproduce the industrial level workforce (Foucault, 1977). In addition, although the evidence-based discourse of attainment is hard to argue with, the power of commensality to build school

community has been challenged by, among others, Benn and Carlsson (2014): the eating of a single meal together does not necessarily provide the impetus to create unity.

On reflection, we were surprised that schools, and specifically academic attainment, were not more dominant in the data, particularly given the good evidence which was drawn on in relation to this. For the most part, it was the *first* discourse that appeared in a text, but it was usually not the dominant one, and was associated with less detail and less emphasis than one might expect in an educational, or education-justified, policy. For us this is why school attainment and community is a main discourse: it is the most expected one, and its lack of prevalence among the data is interesting in itself. It suggests that attainment (despite its pervasiveness in education policy more generally) is not the most important thing that food can do, in the way that the Coalition government constructed it.

Health

The 'Health' discourse creates a world of evidence and experts, where body weight is a quantifiable health outcome of great importance. Other key objects include nutrition and nutrients, obesity, the NHS (and the associated taxpayer) and public health. School children are constructed as potential patients and as either potential obese or healthy adults (but never both).

Health is constructed as a transmissible object, with food being the means by which it is passed on. 'Good' schools and parents can transmit it to school children, and ultimately to their children through the food they offer and the cooking skills that they teach: 'we also want to help today's children grow into healthy adults, with good eating habits that will sustain them for the rest of their lives' (Dimbleby & Vincent, p. 58). By regular participation in healthy eating in schools, children become enculturated into healthy eating in wider and later life. Transmission can also happen in reverse: by reaching students, parents' habits can be changed. Conversely, ill health can be transmitted via 'bad' schools and parents via the food on offer and the 'bad' habits they encourage of relying on processed food and takeaways. The instigation of 'cooking lessons' in the National Curriculum is specifically linked to the development of good habits in *The School Food Plan* (Dimbleby & Vincent, 2013) and in the preamble of the Cooking and Nutrition section of the Design and Technology curriculum:

> As part of their work with food, pupils should be taught how to cook and apply the principles of nutrition and healthy eating. Instilling a love of cooking in pupils will also open a door to one of the great expressions of human creativity. Learning how to cook is a crucial life skill that enables pupils to feed themselves and others affordably and well, now and in later life. (DfE, 2013, p.4)

Although 'creativity' is also referenced, the heath discourse appears both in the idea of the 'principles of nutrition' and through the skills for 'later life'. The shaping of pupils into independent food preparers is both an object and the means to attain it. This preamble also echoes, in 'affordably', the economic discourse which is discussed below.

The authors of the School Food Plan make specific links between certain types of food – processed, with a long-shelf life – and various health problems:

> This is not 'food' as our grandparents would recognise it. It is making the developed world sick – with diabetes, heart disease and cancer – and costing us billions of pounds in healthcare. (Dimbleby & Vincent, 2013, p.23)

This extract draws on a number of recognisable lesser discourses, including food as tradition ('our grandparents'), and health as an economic issue – it is 'costing us billions of pounds in healthcare'. Elsewhere DImbleby and Vincent quote a statistic claiming that 20% of children are obese by the end of primary school; they refer both to the cost to the NHS of obesity-related illness (£5.1 billion) and of other diet-related illness (£5.8 billion) (2013, p. 30. Health in general, and obesity in particular, is the main focus of their first chapter, 'Why it Matters.' Others have pointed out that health, and specifically obesity, has become a moral discourse (Monaghan, 2005; Rich & Evans, 2005); there is a further link here in terms of the individual's responsibility to society, in which becoming obese makes you a burden on the economic well-being of the nation.

Here, food which is not promoting good health is constructed as not-food. This construction is related to what might be termed a 'quiet spot' in the data, the question of hunger. Food is not only not simply an answer to hunger, food which only assuages hunger is not-food. Eating the wrong food therefore becomes analogous to not eating at all. 'Hungry children struggle to concentrate and may disrupt the whole class', according to Gove and Laws (2014), but in the previous sentence it is made clear that 'hungry children' are both those who cannot afford school lunches and those whose packed lunches are not 'nutritious'. The problem is very rarely framed in terms of hungry children, despite the rise

of the use of food banks in England in the last five years[1]; despite evidence that being underweight, rather than overweight is associated with excess death in the developed world (Flegal et al, 2005); and despite schools' own talk about children and food frequently incorporating hunger in terms of insufficient food (e.g. Tickle, 2014). In this data, wrong food is not no-calorie or low-calorie, but wrong-calorie; that is, it is the kind of food which stimulates bad behaviour, which saps concentration and which causes obesity, with its attendant financial cost to society. In the light of a more general public discourse which talks of the 'war against fat' (Monaghan, 2005, p. 309), obesity, and therefore its proxy, not-food, comes to signify both social status and moral judgement (Monaghan, 2005; Rich & Evans, 2005), because it must be a result of ignorance, of laziness, or of unwillingness to discipline the self.

Some researchers have linked the health discourse, and specifically the signification of obesity, to social inequality. Monaghan suggests that it is possible that 'body fat has become a highly visible, often enduring, deeply personalized corporeal marker for inferior social status in a way that smoking and hypertension are not' (2005, p. 310). In this way, the 'manufactured fear and loathing' (Monaghan, 2005, p. 309) over obesity becomes a method for castigating the less powerful in terms of social inequality. Some of this criticism might be silenced in the framing of the health discourse within the data of this study: health is presented as a potential problem for all, not just those who cannot afford to eat well. (The efficacy of this obviating of social inequality in terms of class is challenged by the 'Manners Maketh Man' discourse, outlined below.) Food and health is about knowledge as much as it is about affordability. (Think again of the head boy and girl in the extract from the School Food Plan quoted in the introduction – a simple explanation of the true benefits of eating food rather than not-food is apparently all they require to see the light.) This may perhaps be read in the light of the tension between neoliberalism and liberal paternalism mentioned earlier. Pupils and families cannot be trusted to make the 'right' choice for themselves, and must be educated into it, despite the conflict between this and governance by the market.

Those silenced by this discourse, therefore, include those 'factivists', scientists, and critical theorists concerned with the evidence that fitness and bodyweight are not correlates

[1] The Trussell Trust, the UK's largest network of foodbanks, gives figures on its website to show that in the year 2009-10, 40, 898 people were given three days worth of emergency food. In the year 2013-2014 that number had increased more than twentyfold to 913, 138. (www.trusselltrust.org/stats)

and who wish to reframe discussions about public health in line with what is known by the scientific community about weight and health (e.g. Gaesser, 2005). Also silenced by this discourse are those arguing that hunger and malnutrition are a threat to children's well being in England such as those given a voice by the *Guardian* newspaper (Tickle, 2014).

Party Political Identity

The fields of anthropology and sociology have long been aware of the power that food has to signify identity – what we eat, how and when we eat and who we eat with all carry meaning about a range of issues, including family, caste, age, class, and national and cultural identities (see for example, the work of Margaret Mead; Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013; Rabikowska, 2010; Vallianatos & Raine, 2008; Prasad, 2006). In recent years we have seen how the consumption of bacon sandwiches, pasties and burgers have all been imbued with meaning by politicians and the public. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore, that within the data the 'Party Political Identity' discourse was repeatedly mobilised in talk about food in schools:

> The Conservatives, on the other hand, have made it clear that their priority is to help some families over others, with a tax break for married couples. A tax break for some, funded through the taxes of everybody else - that tells you everything you need to know about their values.
>
> We, however, will help all families in these tough times, not just the kind we like best, by helping their young children get the best possible start in life – and that tells you everything about our values. Providing this kind of help, Liberal Democrats, is now, the most important thing we can do (Clegg, 2013).

Food in schools therefore has the power to distinguish not only between the have and the have-nots, the eaters of food and not-food, but also between 'them and 'us' along party political lines: according to this extract from Nick Clegg's 2013 party conference speech, you can spot a Liberal Democrat from their prioritisation of universal free school meals. It is also a tool for delivering party political values: it is through these free school meals that the Liberal Democrats will carry out their political mission. Indeed, food in schools surpasses the status of mere party political shibboleth or means of social engineering, in having the capacity to restore public faith in politicians:

> Aside from anything else, that is how we restore people's faith in our politics: by delivering for them in ways that are relevant and real. By talking to people about the things they care about, not what the political classes are talking about (Clegg, 2013).

This also constructs food as something which people care about (as opposed to party politics); it is an essential part of both individual lives and society as a whole. Members of both Coalition parties mobilise this discourse to construct food in schools as a link to their historical past. David Laws draws explicit links between the Liberal Democrats' push for free school meals to the 'pioneers' of the late 19th and early 20th century movements to feed school children (Laws, 2014). It is interesting that within this framing there is a level of comfort with the idea of free school meals as a movement which is both 'progressive' and 'radical' and also based firmly in the historical precedent, with the innate conservatism that this implies.

Manners maketh man

The 'Manners maketh man' discourse creates a world of 'table manners' , 'proper use of knife and fork' and 'proper crockery' in which teaching children to be courteous civilises them. In this world middle-class table manners and food culture become a metonym for cultural capital and enable social mobility:

> Because eating together, talking together, using that knife and fork, learning how to be civilised, learning how to be courteous, learning how to be polite sets them on a course for success later in life. (Gove, October 2013)

In this discourse it is not just the content but the context of food in schools that has power. By replacing 'prison-style trays with proper crockery' (Dimbleby & Vincent, 2013, p.136) school caterers can alter the career trajectory of pupils (from felon to successful bourgeoisie?). It is of note here that when commissioning the report into school meals, *The School Food Plan*, Michael Gove chose two restaurateurs whose touchstones of 'locally sourced and organic ingredients' (Dimbleby & Vincent, 2013, p.70) 'table manners' (p.18) and 'vibrant food culture' (p.76) suggest a concern as much with the cultural signifiers surrounding the consumption of food in schools as with its nutritional content. Within this discourse was the recurrent praise for schools where teachers and children sat down together for lunch, and practised conversation and correct use of cutlery. Perhaps the most

striking statement in regard to this discourse is that made by Gove in his 2013 Conservative party conference speech: 'all infant children will get free school meals and the reason that is so important is they won't just get the right nutrition, they will get the right values' (Gove, October 2013). Nutrition is almost a by-product of a process which imbues the correct 'values'. That these values might be contested is not even considered.

The concern, therefore, with these 'less tangible virtues' (Gove & Laws, 2014) of food in schools silences those who might suggest that there is more to social mobility than knowing how to wield a knife and fork, or indeed that the most efficient route to 'making society fairer' (Call Clegg, Sept 2013) may be via paths other than enabling movement between social classes. In this discourse the middle-class way is the right way, and schools are a training-ground for learning those less tangible virtues of dinner conversation, table manners, and the use of cutlery. The implication is that this will enable or incite other 'virtues', such as hard work, or buying into a neoliberal model of self-improvement, potentially drawing on the idea that increasing aspirations of young people leads to transformation in their educational and future working lives.

Economic

The world this discourse constructs is one of markets, consumers, and profit. Within this world, the new policy on provision of Free School Meals is frequently seen in light of its financial benefits to parents and families. Equally, and oddly, it is also constructed as a (potential) financial benefit to schools. Sustainability of school dinners is seen as entirely dependent on their profitability; the universal provision of Free School Meals in Key Stage 1 is a way to enculturate children into eating school meals, thus ensuring that schools reach the break-even point of 50% take up (Dimbleby & Vincent, 2013).

This discourse creates two interesting subject positions: headteacher (or school cook) as entrepreneur and child as (curtailed) consumer. The headteacher (or school cook) as entrepreneur has the responsibility to promote the profitability of school dinners, by using a number of approaches to increase take-up among pupils, and drive down costs. This is not to suggest that the discourse positions headteachers as neglecting pupil welfare. Rather, it constructs profits as being for the good of pupils. Within this discourse, therefore, headteachers as entrepreneurs pursue profits as part of their responsibility to do their best for the children in their charge. This draws on other dominant discourses' construction of

school meals as being good for children (see above) whilst constructing profit as the only way to ensure their sustainability. In addition, profits can be used for other benefits, either by driving down the price of meals for the child, or by being used in some other way to improve school life.

In order to act as entrepreneurs, headteachers (or school cooks, depending on the context) lower prices in order to increase take-up, consult children as consumers on menus, invest in redecoration of dining rooms, and switch to proper crockery rather than the airline or prison-style trays. In doing so, they create what might be termed a pseudo-restaurant experience, in which the focus is on an enjoyable, civilised experience, for which money is exchanged. The metaphor of the restaurant trade is used throughout *The School Food Plan* to signpost desirable actions: 'A half-empty dining hall - like a half-empty restaurant - is certain to lose money' (Dimbleby & Vincent, 2013, p. 7). They may also drive down costs in other ways: the School Food Plan notes admiringly the actions of individual cooks who reach out to their communities for donations of food, or who employ the voluntary services of parents to butcher pigs raised on school premises (Dimbleby & Vincent, 2013, p.109).

The child, meanwhile, is positioned as a consumer within this world. They can both spend and save money, and they can make choices: to have a packed lunch, to eat in school, to spend money off site (in secondary schools), and between different meal options. However, whilst using much of the language of choice, the discourse actually constructs the importance of limiting choice. Under the guise of 'Give Children What they Want', headteachers are advised to 'Manage children's choices to ensure they get a balanced meal, instead of stuffing themselves full of bread rolls. Offer a cheaper 'set menu' meal; require children to fill their plates with options from different categories; or simply put vegetables on their plates' (Dimbleby & Vincent, 2013, p.135) and to 'Make sure packed lunches are not a 'better' option. Ban sugary drinks, crisps and confectionery, or offer prizes and other incentives for bringing in a healthy lunch' (Dimbleby & Vincent, 2013, p.136), or even to ban packed lunches altogether. This advice shows that choice can be limited in several ways: offering economic or other incentives; banning less desired choices; setting constraints which manipulate choice or simply removing it altogether. The language of this section of *The School Food Plan* retreats from the neoliberal concentration on markets and profits earlier in the report, instead becoming that of soft paternalism: steering individuals for their own good (a choice which has also been made elsewhere, see for example Just *et al*., 2008).

The benefits constructed in other discourses for food in schools rely on it being the right sort of food, so choice must of necessity be limited for the benefits to accrue. Children therefore become curtailed consumers.

The economic discourse can also be seen in interplay with the health discourse. The relationship of the individual's health (whether obesity or other diet-related illness) to the NHS is seen in terms of the (enormous) cost to the taxpayer; thus an individual's lack of health damages society as a whole. Economics becomes a means by which individual personal health is justified as a moral issue for society at large.

Good Parent/ Bad Parent: the moral dimension of food in schools

There is a discourse which constructs good and bad parenting, the deserving and non-deserving poor, the philanthropic State and Big Society. Parents are constructed as having the responsibility to pass on cooking skills to their children, to enable them to eat healthily and cheaply. A sub-group of these parents is constructed as having failed to do so:

> 'But today, in the age of mass-produced convenience food, we find ourselves in unprecedented difficulty. Several generations have now been raised in households where no one ever cooked[2]. They have never seen their parents whisk an egg or peel a potato, let alone boil a carcass to make cheap stock. Cut off from this inheritance – the gift of self-sufficiency – they, in turn, don't know how to feed their own children, and cannot teach them to feed themselves.' (DImbleby & Vincent, 2013, p. 35).

This broken chain is given as a reason for the introduction of compulsory cooking into the National Curriculum to age 14, implemented in September 2014. As well as teaching pupils how to eat (Manners Maketh Man), schools are places where they learn how to cook. It is important to note that the failure of parents in this regard is constructed not as wilful or malicious but as ignorant: the chain has been broken and they themselves have not inherited the skills which they should be passing on to their children. A fundamental contrast between parents' desires for their children and their inability to fulfil these is also

[2] This 'several generations' rhetoric echoes the (discredited) rhetoric of three generations of unemployment in the same household produced by Coalition governments.

constructed: ‘every parent wants their child to be able to eat healthily’, yet ‘many parents mistakenly imagine that a packed lunch is the healthiest option’ (Laws, 2014). Food in schools, therefore, is constructed as having the capacity to compensate for parental insufficiencies. School dinners are able to save children from their own and their parents’ ignorance, by providing a healthy alternative, since ‘while there might be a few conscientious children who seek out a wholesome meal on the high street, the vast majority of children who go off site for lunch spend their money on junk food, canned drinks, crisps and sweets’ (Dimbleby & Vincent, 2013, p. 48).

Just as there are good parents who can provide healthy and balanced packed lunches, there are ‘conscientious’ children, who make ‘wholesome’ choices; the other side of the coin is the ‘bad parents’ who, through ignorance, fail to provide their children with the kind of food that makes them into good students, promoting concentration and good behaviour in the classroom. These kind of a children become a threat to the children of the good parents: ‘hungry children struggle to concentrate and may disrupt the whole class’ (Gove & Laws, 2014). This discourse, therefore, constructs an ‘other’, in opposition to the reader or recipient of the texts in this study.

However, this parental failure may also be as the result of poverty; although the usual recipients of Free School Meals would come into this category, there is a fresh recognition of ‘the problem of feeding pupils from low-income working families who don’t quite qualify for free school meals but whose parents can’t afford to pay for them (or to put together a nutritious packed lunch)’ (Gove & Laws, 2014). Again the relationship between choice and constraint comes to the fore, this time with parents as the target. Universal free school meals become a reward for the hardworking poor, as well as making up for the deficiencies of the ‘bad parent’ which might affect the children of the ‘good parent’. It also returns to the economic discourse:

> There are other benefits too — the policy will cut child poverty and improve incentives to work. At present, losing more than £400 per child per year in free meals is a big work penalty. (Gove & Laws, 2014)

This discourse powerfully constructs the deserving poor, and by contrast, the undeserving poor, returning to the mores of the Victorian era. In doing so, it also constructs food in schools as a means of philanthropy, and an opportunity for the ‘Big Society’ to work: this sees as moral a position which from a socialist viewpoint is decidedly immoral, namely the

transfer of the responsibility of the state to the generosity of the individual. The disincentive to work represented by losing Free School Meal eligibility, suggested by Gove and Laws in their *Times* article (2014), sits squarely within the discourse of welfare dependency and the 'broken society' identified by Wiggan (2012).

Discussion and conclusions

Throughout these major discourses run two main themes. There is a tension between neoliberalism and liberal paternalism established both by the very existence of universal free school meals, and by the need to constrain the market and choices within it in order to realise the benefits for society and individuals in terms of health and social cohesion. The interplay between the apparently dichotomous schools of neoliberalism and soft paternalism is seen most clearly in the Economic discourse.

> Free school meals are sometimes regarded as an aspiration and idea from the political left. But I regard this as a common sense policy for the mainstream majority. (Laws, 2014)

The emphasis on the profit motive (neoliberalism) serves to make palatable the 'socialist' roots of free school meals to those on the right, while soft paternalism prevents this from alienating the educationalists and those on the left, through an emphasis on the good of the individual child. In this way the notion of universal benefits is both wrested from the political left and positioned as an aberration ('counterintuitively' (Gove and Laws, 2014)) that can be justified through the language of neoliberalism/soft paternalism rather than socialism.

This tension can to some extent be resolved, however, by the consequences of the way food is constructed in this data. Food in schools becomes such a powerful object, as both the cause of and the solution to so many social ills, that these discourses play a part in placing the responsibility of these issues in the hands of individuals, the bad parent who provides not-food for their children/ the ignorant or lazy child of bad parents who chooses to consume not-food. Yes, the state can intervene, but only by doing for the children of bad parents what the children of good parents are doing already – providing good food. Alternative viewpoints – that problems in schools/wider society are larger than the individual and can only be solved by making large scale structural changes to counter social injustice and inequality - are therefore silenced by these discourses which individuate them

to such an extent. Thus a policy which is seen in Sweden as a significant (and proud) symbol of the welfare state (Osowski, Göranzon & Fjellström , 2010) can be in the UK a means by which the non-conforming individual can be constructed as responsible for their ills, and those of others. Therefore both neoliberals, who might wish to see a diminishment of the state, and the soft paternalists, who might wish for guided improvements in individual lives, are satisfied.

The second major theme that runs through the discourses we have explored is that of morality. Food in schools is the means by which any number of apparently moral things can be accomplished: improving the health of children; creating social cohesion within a school by removing stigma; creating a focus for inter-generational contact; improving educational attainment; and being a benefit for parents in poverty. Yet one of the clearest moral outcomes of the universal free school meal policy – feeding children who are hungry because their parents cannot afford to feed them – is barely touched upon. Instead, food in schools becomes another mechanism within the wider discourse of scroungers and strivers within the Coalition (Valentine and Harris, 2014), in tangent with the class prejudice inherent in, and disguised by, the 'Manners Maketh Man' and Health discourses. The othering of the 'Good Parent/ Bad Parent' discourse creates a scenario in which parents can see themselves as the 'Good parent' and others as the bad parent, contributing to discourses of division already identified in the work of Wiggan (2012).

Thanks to these powerful discourses the blame for 'problems' within a school (and, if we see school as a microcosm of the larger community, society as a whole) such as bad behaviour, disunity caused by apparent differences in class and wealth and the different predicted life trajectories of children from opposite ends of the socio-economic scale can be placed onto food in schools and those who do not /cannot provide 'good' food – the othered bad parent. The solution to these problems can also be found in food in schools. By providing free school meals for younger children, encouraging (via various means) older children to buy food in school and providing cookery lessons the bad parent's influence can be bypassed. Food with 'proper' nutrition will do away with poor concentration and disruptive behaviour; everyone eating the same food will erase class and wealth differences bringing the (school) community together; and the context with which food in school is delivered – via proper cutlery and sat round a table with good conversation - will apparently give working class children the skills to climb the social ladder.

In this paper we have sought to identify and challenge some of the narratives within this particular area of policy; this is the potential of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, to prevent powerful discourses created by the powerful from going uncontested. Yet the policy landscape has moved on: at the time of writing it seems likely that universal free school meals for the first two years of school will be cut as part of the new Conservative government's comprehensive spending review. The role of headteacher as entrepreneur in making school dinners pay may yet become even more essential in supporting food in schools to do the things the Coalition government expected of it.

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