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PROBLEMATIZING EQUITY IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY: AN APPLICATION OF BACCHI'S POST-STRUCTURAL ANALYTICAL APPROACH

DENISE MIFSUD

University of Bath, UK

ABSTRACT

Achieving basic education and equitable education outcomes remains a challenge, therefore, improving equity in education has evolved as a particularly important policy priority in all OECD countries. This chapter concentrates on equity in the Maltese education system, with a particular focus on how the policyscape makes provision for achieving, improving, and maintaining equity in compulsory schooling. As an EU member state, Malta has been affected by the evolution, causes, and consequences of social, educational, and economic inequalities that have been an ardently contentious and controversial issue given the recent economic crisis in Europe. This chapter utilizes Bacchi's 'What's the problem

represented to be?' (WPR) approach to analyse national school inclusion policy in Malta as illustrative of policies mobilized to address the problem of inequality, therefore acknowledging the need for a provision of equity as a major agenda. The results of this small-scale study have theoretical and methodological implications for academics, policymakers, and practitioners in the educational policy field. This study highlights the fact that there are a number of persistent challenges for achieving equity in education, especially the immigrant-native educational gap, despite European policy makers having been very active in the educational field.

Keywords: Bacchi; equity; inclusion; Malta; OECD; post-structural policy analysis; problem representation

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that scars from unresolved societal challenges may run deeper than many have anticipated. Inequality. Economic polarisation. The loss of a sense of common good. Broken expectations for a fair future. A contributor to this growing unrest is the persistent belief that the cards we were dealt with at birth determine our future. Too few adults beat the odds their personal characteristics have fated them to: those from a disadvantaged background are less likely to participate in education, perform well, find suitable employment and pursue lifelong learning. As a result, they are less likely to develop the skills needed to succeed in our changing economy. And they are at higher risk of transmitting this disadvantage to the next generation. (Doumet, 2021, n.p.)

The pandemic-induced school closures and the ensuing home-schooling widened the already present gap for disadvantaged students, whose experience mainly depended on the level of home support provided. This matter may be considered as an example of technology-assisted teaching and learning amplifying existing inequalities in access and quality of learning (Mifsud, 2022). Governments faced numerous challenges as they transitioned to distance learning, such as limited institutional capacity to support teachers, poor access for vulnerable populations, and lack of coherent policies and funds to support remote learning (UNESCO et al., 2021). Following substantial periods of closure, students returned with unequal levels of knowledge and skills. Some students, especially those from more underprivileged backgrounds, failed to return. Understanding and mitigating the impact of school closures, especially

in terms of learning losses is high on the agenda of education policy makers who are striving to minimize disruptions to education, particularly towards the most disadvantaged. This leads to an explicit emphasis on equity in education.

Equity 'is viewed as the extent to which individuals can take advantage of education and training, in terms of opportunities, access, treatment, and outcomes' (European Commission, 2006, p. 2). In other words, equity in education and schooling is based on the premises of fairness and inclusion, which signifies that personal and/or social circumstances such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, age, and geographical location, among other factors, do not pose obstacles to the accomplishment of a student's educational aptitude and the accomplishment of a modicum level of competences. Consequently, equity does not imply the provision of the same resources to students, nor them having the same outcomes (OECD, 2012). Achieving basic education and equitable education outcomes remains a challenge (OECD, 2021); therefore, improving equity in education has evolved as a particularly important policy priority in all OECD countries.

This chapter concentrates on equity in the Maltese education system, with a particular focus on how the policyscape makes provision for achieving, improving, and maintaining equity in compulsory schooling. As an EU member state, Malta has been affected by the evolution, causes, and consequences of social, educational, and economic inequalities that have been an ardently contentious and controversial issue given the recent economic crisis in Europe. In Malta, responsibility for the education system lies with the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR). Education is provided by state, church (predominantly Catholic), and independent schools. The government's education policy is underscored by two main premises: equity and quality. This commitment is evidenced by an inclusive policy to all levels of education, together with the provision of free education from early childhood education and care to tertiary education in state institutions, except for students from non-EU/EAA countries. The state subsidizes church schools, which do not charge tuition fees, and grants tax rebates to parents whose children attend independent schools.

This chapter utilizes Bacchi's (2009, 2012) WPR approach to analyse national school inclusion policy in Malta, more specifically 'A Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools' and 'A National Inclusive Education Framework' (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2019). These policy documents embrace the concept, values, and principles of inclusive education into the realm of responding positively to all learners' diversity, with the aim of bringing together all the stakeholders in order to create a school environment conducive to learning, thereby giving all learners the education they are entitled to. The adopted WPR policy analysis approach provides a systematic

methodology to critically question 'the taken-for-granted assumptions that lodge in government policies and policy proposals by interrogating (problematizing) the problem representations it uncovers within them' (Bacchi, 2009, p. xv), which in this case would be the notion of equity as represented in Maltese education policy and how this is expected to be conceived, translated, and interpreted by the policy actors and/or subjects in compulsory schooling.

The following section problematizes the concept of equity in education/schooling and subsequently education policy, as presented in the literature. This is followed by a presentation of the Maltese policy background in relation to equity, with a particular focus on the school population demographics due to migrant students that have been exacerbated by the recent influx of EU and non-EU/EAA migrants, and the resulting intersectionality of race, religion, culture with the socio-economic status. I discuss Bacchi's (2009, 2012) WPR approach and the rationale behind its application to analyse national school inclusion policy documents in Malta. The actual policy analyses follow, together with the discussion, limitations, recommendations for future research, and conclusions in relation to policy and practice with regards to improving equity in relation to post-pandemic schooling provision.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Equity in Education: A Necessary Pre-Condition for and/or Desirable Outcome of Schooling? What Is Equity and Why Is It Needed in Education?

The OECD builds its definition of equity on the principles of inclusion and fairness, without implying the need for similar outcomes among all students, nor the provision of the same teaching and learning resources, but considers the individual's specific needs. Equity in education is a necessity, rather than a desirable outcome for various reasons. This is mainly due to the fact that education and its subsequent impact on one's life opportunities and future contribution to society and economy being a basic human right. Hence, enhancing equity in education is a high priority in all OECD countries. While education systems with greater equity have a number of features in common related to organization and governance, access and participation, finance and funding, migrant background, digital divide, socio-economic status, special needs, and gender, no one policy or practice offers a warranty of success (OECD, 2012).

Equity has emerged as both a policy and research priority in the European Union (Hippe et al., 2016). It is one of the priority areas of the strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training (ET,

2020) (European Commission, 2016). This has mainly developed due to the acknowledgement of the controversial nature of redistributive policies; attributing differences in economic performance to unequal opportunities rather than income inequalities, leading to insights about the population subgroups who would reap the most benefits from policy interventions. Consequently, research exploring equity and inequality in education has thrived over the last decade, translating into numerous educational reforms across the EU and OECD countries. The OECD categorizes educational reforms under six broad categories, one of which is Equity (and Quality) (EQ) (OECD, 2016).

The equity issue raises further questions around social justice and the role schools have to play in this regard:

> If school-level education … influences job prospects and income, should it be a means to address economic inequalities in society? Should education authorities strive for an equal distribution of educational opportunities, of positive educational outcomes, or of both? Moreover, should education authorities do anything to combat the phenomenon whereby students from lower socio-economic family backgrounds are, on average, less likely to achieve good results in schools? (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020, p. 27)

While schools are crucial to ensure the provision of equitable education, they may also contribute (advertently or inadvertently) to the transformation of socio-economic inequalities into educational inequalities. Schools are embedded within the wider education system with its own particular structure, policies, practices, and traditions that ultimately have a bearing upon the degree of equity in education. Fig. 1 illustrates inter-related system-level features that influence equity in schooling according to a standardization-stratification continuum.

The degree of stratification in an education system reflects the extent of educational differentiation in terms of student groupings or geographical segregation, for example. Standardization refers to reaching nationwide benchmarks and this may take the form of standardization of input (in terms of curriculum, teacher quality, and resource allocation) and standardization of output (in terms of school leaving examinations and external school evaluation) (Checchi et al., 2016). On the stratification side of the wheel, Eurydice (2020) includes diversity of school types; school choice; school admission policies; tracking; and grade repetition. The standardization side comprises school autonomy and school accountability. Support measures for equity promotion in education include support for disadvantaged schools and low-achieving students, as well as measures to increase student learning opportunities; funding; and early childhood education and care provision.
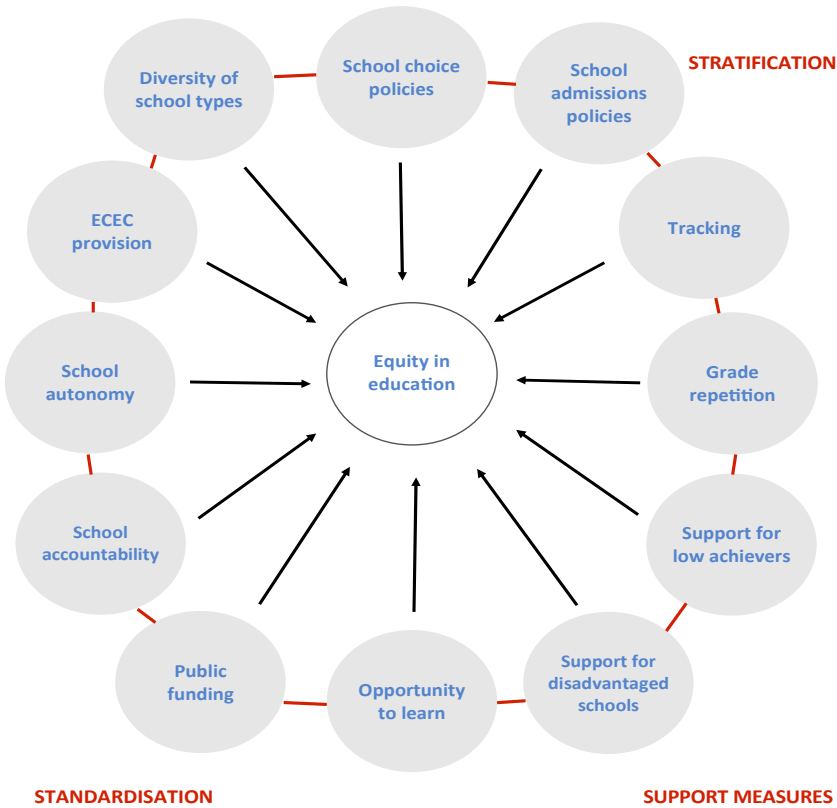
Fig. 1. Systemic Factors Potentially Influencing Equity in School Education (Adapted from Eurydice, 2020, p. 31).

Drawing on the latest international student assessment data, equity in school, in terms of both inclusion and fairness, varies widely across Europe (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020), which is not surprising as the report includes the different structures and policies of 42 education systems across 37 countries. While highly stratified systems exhibit lower equity levels, especially at secondary level, none of the policies intending to offset systemic stratification had a statistically significant bearing on equity. This leads to another dilemma in the education equity discourse/s which is the confusion over 'inclusion' and 'equity' as principles since they are context-based, according to Ainscow (2020a), thus having a distinct meaning to different people, with local education policies failing to clarify these widely understood definitions. Lack of consensus over the 'inclusive education' concept remains (Ainscow, 2020b), despite its global understanding as a principle embracing diversity amongst all learners in its quest to eliminate social exclusion emanating from

discriminatory attitudes about race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender, and ability (UNESCO, 2017). Raffo and Gunter (2008) explore the equity problematic with regards to social inclusion and education, with a specific focus on economic and cultural inclusion with regards to gender, race, and ethnicity. To what extent can education bring about economic inclusion as a surrogate for social inclusion? How may institutional rules and processes culturally exclude some groups due to representation and stereotyping within school systems and discourses?

This equity problem leads to three recent phenomena that have emerged from other transversal research areas that shed light on the spatial dimension of education, thus furthering our understanding of the sources and consequences of educational inequities within Europe. These are territorial development; gender inequality; and immigration (Hippe et al., 2016). Relevant regional variations within countries exist, often these being more pronounced than between different countries in the EU. Despite women having outperformed men in educational attainment (Meschi & Scervini, 2014), disparities still exist that are attributable to cultural values and attitudes rather than lower ability (OECD, 2015). The integration of immigrants across European educational systems is a policy priority due to their very low achievement in relation to native students in the majority of European countries.

The OECD: Equity and Education Policy

The OECD has emerged as a significant universal policy actor at the forefront of 'a global education policy field' (Lingard, 2011, p. 368) while contributing to 'policy convergence' (Grek, 2009) across nations through its policy suggestions that are not meant to be binding but simply suggestive. The OECD utilizes its international assessment programmes as a means of comparing educational performance across nations, which ultimately leads to a concern with equity in education. Boyum (2014) problematizes the notion of equity as promoted by the OECD, questioning its place within the neoliberal thrust of OECD education policy and the marketization of education. Equity has detached itself from traditional ideas of social justice and guised itself as formal access to education and participation in economic markets. However, the concept of fairness is isolated from social justice as a whole, with hardly any attempt to relate fairness within the educational system to fairness within the social system at both micro and macro levels. In the words of Boyum (2014, p. 868), 'While the OECD insist strongly that coming from a disadvantaged home should not be a disadvantage in education, they do not question whether there should be disadvantaged homes at all'.

On the other hand, Savage et al. (2013) argue that the OECD has been the driving force in discerning 'equity' from previous conceptions of 'equality'. The equity concept varies across education policies in different systems, thus leading to varying policy implications. What constitutes 'fairness' or 'justice' or 'egalitarianism' is debatable. Equity may be understood in terms of 'fairness', thus implying redistributive policies, while if understood in terms of 'inclusion' and 'recognition' this would imply constructive policies, while 'equality of opportunity' leads to the 'education for all' policy movement. Equity as a concept 'often remains nebulous and ill-defined in policies' while 'inequity has remained a vexatious policy problem globally' (Savage et al., 2013, p. 161). Clarke (2014) refers to 'equity as a sublime object', leading to 'accountability with a conscience' (p. 592), ultimately declaring that 'equity dilemmas are never far from centre stage in social and political life' (p. 593). This also leads to the implication that policy discourses around equity are positioned on the presumption of inadequacy, thus rendering current equity arrangements for the welfare state as unrighteous and in dire need of transformation.

The reconstitution of education within the hegemony of contemporary neoliberal policy makes us reflect on the convergence of *economic* concerns with productivity (translated in the 'quality' focus in education policy) with the *political* concerns of democratic access, inclusion, and participation (translated in 'equity' in education policy terms) (Clarke, 2014). The 'quality' and 'equity' notion in education policy may also be problematized around concerns of *what* is to be distributed; *who* are the distributees; *how* it is to be distributed; the *manner* of distribution; with an emphasis on the *process* or *product*, while embracing *universal* or *particular* values. In fact, social justice in the political realm is a highly contested notion, with policy thinking around this notion in most western countries revolving around the three distinct philosophical traditions of liberal-humanism, market-individualism, and social democracy, with different countries highlighting distinctive aspects of these traditions (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Due to restricted state policy choices in an era of globalization, national policy mechanisms have become more interconnected within a networked, restructured state, highlighting the need to explore international issues of education and justice from comparative *and* relational terms. Policy is contestable due to its conceptual complexity and context dependability, encompassing a wider net than government policymakers and the generated policy texts. It comprises everyday practices and artefacts, moulded and performed by multiple human and non-human actors in a mesh of interdependent local and global contexts (Ball, 2012; Ball et al., 2012).

BACKGROUND

Education in Malta: Compulsory Schooling, Education Policy, and the Pursuit of Equity

The common thread running through education reforms in Malta post-independence is the widening of access to education, thus being in line with the politics of social justice.

The Maltese educational system which is largely centralized due to the size of the country has been undergoing a structured, gradual but steady change in terms of decentralization and increased school autonomy, with the main aim being that of renewal – modernizing it in line with global policy development. This unfolded via a revised national minimum curriculum published in 1999, establishing compulsory schooling as the start of a lifelong process of education. This was followed by the introduction of state school networks according to their geographical location for the provision of continuous education from 3 to 16. Subsequently, mixed-ability classes were introduced throughout the primary school years, eliminating the hitherto streamed primary classes in the final two years, followed by the phasing out of the 11+ examination – thus enabling a smoother flow from one level of education to another.

A further curriculum review in 2012 led to a framework that replaced discriminatory educational arrangements with comprehensive ones in a bid to promote progress for all learners. Additional equity and decentralization in the national system were attempted through a learning outcomes framework intending to address individual learning needs through the freedom from centrally imposed knowledge-centric syllabi. Another recent landmark in compulsory education has been the launch of a 'Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024' (MEDE, 2014a), based on the four values of equity, social justice, inclusivity, and diversity, in order to provide generations with skills and talents for employability and citizenship in the twenty-first century, thus aiming to reduce the gaps in education outcomes, reduce the high incidence of early school-leavers, and increase participation in lifelong learning.

'Education for All: Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta' (European Agency for Special Needs & Inclusive Education, 2014) is a report commissioned by the Minister for Education and Employment that examines special needs education provision in Malta. The main findings reveal an education system that reinforces an integrative approach for some learners, rather than an inclusive one for all; school level practices that do not foster inclusion; in addition to a lack of equity and full participation for all. This led to the drafting and eventual launch of 'A Policy on Inclusive Education

in Schools' and 'A National Inclusive Education Framework' (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2019), that embrace the concept, values, and principles of inclusive education into the realm of responding positively to all learners' diversity. These aim to bring together all the stakeholders in order to create a school environment conducive to learning, thereby giving all learners the education they are entitled to. The majority of students attend mainstream schools, with only a small percentage attending resource centres that cater for those with severe special educational needs (SEN). Different learning provision is in place for those attending mainstream schools, namely in the form of individualized education programmes (IEPs) for SEN students who have the support of a learning support educator (LSE) on a full time or shared basis; services for students with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties (SEBD); complementary education programmes in primary schools, in addition to the Prince Trust, the Core Curriculum Programme (CCP), and the Alternative Learning Programme (ALP) in the secondary cycle for those students who require remedial support; as well as the ethics programme for non-Catholic students.

In the meantime, other realities have been unfolding gradually alongside the major reforms happening in the education policyscape. One such recent reform is the introduction of co-education. Although this has been common practice across the state, church, and independent sectors at primary level and in the latter sector at secondary level, it was introduced in state secondary schools in 2013 as an ongoing pilot project. Mid-year examinations in state schools were replaced by continuous formative assessment. Other novelties that were introduced in order to bring about the projected provision of an equitable quality education are the introduction of vocational education and training (VET) subjects at secondary level and a specific focus on e-learning, among others. Due to unprecedented developments within the country's economy thus leading to a new social and cultural reality, teachers have to operate within a globalized environment with an ever-increasing influx of migrants and a local economic reality with identified skills shortages. To partly address this situation and thus improve the integration of migrant children, a Third Country National Co-Ordinator was appointed to advise schools in 2013, with the setting up of the Migrant Learners' Unit at a later date. New challenges, previously non-existent, have been brought about by this situation in terms of language issues, religious beliefs, and the differing expectations of parents.

Overall, Malta occupies a joint 15th place on the EU Social Justice Index. However, when it comes to equitable education, Malta features at the bottom of the EU standings in the area of equitable education (Schraad-Tischler et al., 2017). Consequently, the European Commission has once again called on Malta

to strengthen access to education in its 2019 country-specific recommendations. This therefore points to a very serious achievement gap that is evident in erratic instruction quality, large numbers of under-achievers, school-level variance in achievement, comparatively low participation rates at post-secondary level, gender disparities in achievement, curricular experiences which are not designed to enhance equity in access to education, restricted access to day-care provision and investment in early childhood provision below EU average. Malta has kept step with EU countries in practically all EU education benchmarks. Additionally, in recent years, Malta has participated for the first time in the 'Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study' (TIMSS), 'Progress in International Reading Literacy Study' (PIRLS), and 'Programme for International Student Assessment' (PISA) international studies. These confirmed that whilst our top achievers compare well with those of other countries, we have an unacceptably high level of low achievers. The EU2020 target is to have less than 15% of the student population classified as 'low achievers'.

METHODOLOGY

Utilizing Bacchi's (2009, 2012) WPR Approach to Analyse National School Inclusion Policy in the Maltese State Education System

I make a deliberate choice to use Bacchi's (2009, 2012) WPR approach as my main methodological modus operandi of policy analysis for this small-scale research mainly due to three main reasons that will be described briefly hereunder. It is inspired by Foucauldian theory, more specifically his notions of 'discourse' and 'governmentality', that allows me to draw on his 'trident' (Gillies, 2013) of scepticism, critique, and problematization while adopting a post-structuralist research analysis as a 'political practice'. Secondly, Bacchi's Foucauldian-inspired post-structural approach seems to respond to Ball's (1993) seminal work 'What is policy? Texts, trajectories and toolboxes', more specifically the aligning of 'policy as text' versus 'policy as discourse'. Thirdly, engagement with the WPR framework leads to self-problematization, and consequently self-reflexivity, due to the inclusion of oneself and one's philosophy as part of the analysis process (Bacchi, 2012). Besides resonating with my professional background and experience as simultaneous academic, educational leader/practitioner, and policy actor/subject, this carries particular implications for the intended audience of this book that spans across academics, school practitioners and policymakers.

Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) make a very strong case for a post-structural approach to policy analysis in the provision of such a methodology as a medium for interrogating the unfolding of governmentality. Additionally, it probes and problematizes taken-for-granted policy associations, namely policy itself, knowledges supporting policy and policy proposals, and conventional forms of policy analysis. While noting the absence of post-structuralism in the field of policy research and analysis, they extol its focus on contingency, heterogeneity, plurality and 'constructed' knowledges – 'An explicit challenge to the conventional view that policies *address* problems, it approaches policies as problematizations that *produce* "problems" as particular types of problems' (p. 6, added emphasis).

Ball's (1993) distinction between 'policy as text' and 'policy as discourse' emphasizes policy as both product and process; its presentation and interpretation (policy as text), as well as its framing and discourse development (policy as discourse), the latter giving rise as to

> *who can speak, when, where, and with what authority … We do not speak a discourse, it speaks us … We do not 'know' what we say, we 'are' what we say and do … we are spoken by policies, we take up the positions constructed for us within policies. (p. 14)*

This bold approach to policy sociology is presented by Ball (2015) himself as

> *an attempt to disrupt those comforts and to make us think about how we are made-up as researchers and scholars. It was flawed and brittle and dangerous, but for me it works … as providing a space in which it is necessary to think about what I do. (p. 312)*

Following the same consciousness, Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) promote 'a post-structural sensibility', regarding 'the policy worker *cum* analyst as engaged in the practices of interrogating, criticizing, and evaluating policies, and through these practices, *unmaking* and *re-making policy*' (p. 9, added emphasis).

The WPR approach broadens Foucault's agenda as an analytic strategy, taking forward his concepts of governmentality, discourse, subjectification, and power relations, among others the notion that all policy proposals rely on problematizations that can be opened up and critiqued, creating spaces for contestation, unmaking, and remaking. The WPR methodology interrogates the particular problematizations within policies in its attempt to make visible the politics in the making of 'problems', while making the case that policies 'produce' problems as particular sorts of problems, rather than 'addressing' existing ones. WPR utilizes a 'working backwards' approach to unpack the 'problem representation' (Bacchi, 2009) by critically teasing out its conceptual underpinnings, tracing their genealogy, reflecting on their sustainable

practices, and contemplating their effects. The policy text/s are used as 'levers' in the WPR approach, merely providing a starting point for this problematization rather than an end in themselves. A WPR approach is therefore meant to identify, reconstruct, and interrogate problematizations.

The WPR framework (adapted from Bacchi, 2009) consists of a set of seven questions that instigate the researcher to scrutinize the problem representation critically:

Question 1: What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policies?
Question 2: What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem' (problem representation)?
Question 3: How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
Question 4: What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be conceptualized differently?
Question 5: What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the "problem"?
Question 6: How and where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?
Step 7: Apply this list of questions to your own problem representations.

The aim of Q1 is the identification of a starting point in the analysis, which acts as a springboard to what follows in the identification of the problem representation. The researcher commences from stated solutions to exercise scepticism about their implicit problematization(s).

Q2 seeks meanings that constructed this particular problem representation within the policy itself, in order to identify possible patterns that may reveal an underlying political or governmental rationality in operation.

Q3 intends to 'disrupt any assumption that what *is* reflects what *has to be*' (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 22, original emphasis), to bring to the fore alternative possibilities.

Q4 draws attention to 'silences', or unproblematized elements within the existing problem representation, thus encouraging destabilizing, critical thinking.

Q5 invites researchers to think about the 'effects' of identified problem representations as 'political implications', with a consideration for three specific 'kinds' of effects that are discursive effects, subjectification effects, and lived effects.

Q6 opens up the space for contestation, destabilization, and resistance of the current ubiquitous and imposing problem representations.

The final step in the WPR framework involves self-reflexivity in the application of the above six questions to one's own proposals and problem representations, thus subjecting our own thinking and philosophy to critical scrutiny.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

What Is the Equity Problem Represented to Be in the Maltese
Educational Policy Within the Compulsory School Sector?

Outlining the Process and Parameters

This chapter analyses the notion of equity as represented in Maltese education
policy, focusing on the most recent 'prescriptive texts' (Bacchi, 2009, p. 34),
namely the policy documents 'A Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools:
Route to Quality Inclusion' [henceforth referred to as PIES] and 'A National
Inclusive Education Framework' [henceforth referred to as NIEF] (Ministry
for Education and Employment, 2019). While the policy sets out the aims,
goals, principles, and benchmarks 'to provide a planned and systemic way of
how schools are to develop conducive learning environments for all learn-
ers' (p. 11), in other words, 'inclusive education', the framework is intended
'to provide a clear direction to schools on their journey towards inclusion'
(p. 11) in its presentation of a route for the implementation of the policy
benchmarks. These documents explicitly attribute equity as the driving force
behind the implementation of the inclusion concept, both locally and inter-
nationally, while acknowledging the OECD stance on equity in an education
system comprising the dual dimensions of fairness and inclusion (Schleicher,
2014). I therefore use these two policies as illustrative of policies mobilized to
address the problem of inequality, therefore the need for a provision of equity,
as a major agenda, fully aware of the fact that 'equity' and 'inclusion' cannot
be considered as synonymous, replaceable or interchangeable.

   Given the intertextual nature of policy (Ball, 1993), I am aware of the
fact that these selected documents are likely to reference other national (and
international) policies, legislation, strategies, and standard operating proce-
dures that come with their specific problem representations, which by exclud-
ing would only enable a partial representation of the policy problem. These
formal policy documents constitute a wider network of the larger equity
policy making and implementation assemblage, but an extensive analy-
sis was not possible due to the small-scale nature of this study and book
word limit constraints. I would like to clarify that this chapter focuses on
a policy analysis of equity in compulsory schooling utilizing Bacchi's WPR
approach, and does not look into policy implementation for equity provision.
Notwithstanding, the degree of engagement with equity-related policies is
context-dependent, varying according to the available resources, institutional
ethos, and school leaders' personal dispositions. Consequently, 'The readerly
policies of some are the writerly policies of others, differently positioned'

(Molla & Gale, 2019, p. 872) due to the tendency of the enactment of equity provisions from positions of advantage.

Conscious of the fact that Bacchi (2009) herself acknowledges that different studies emphasize the seven questions in the WPR framework to varying degrees according to the research goals and aims, that is the stance I adopt in my analysis and discussion below, following a similar methodology to education studies adopting the WPR approach selectively (e.g. Torrance et al., 2021; Tawell & McCluskey, 2022). I interrogate the 'solutions' to 'inclusion' (aka, equity) suggested by these policy documents, the 'problem' representations, together with their underlying presuppositions, silences, and effects by aligning Bacchi's WPR Q1 to Q7 according to my study's aims. In the following section, I represent my analysis of the two policy documents and the underlying philosophy about inclusion in the Maltese state education system by discussing my replies to the WPR framework questions.

WPR Q1: What's the Problem Represented to Be in the Most Recent Policy Documents of Inclusive Education in Malta?

Initially, I familiarized myself with the selected policy documents (PIES, 2019; NIEF, 2019) via thorough readings and re-readings to scrutinize the text for 'solutions' and 'problem representations' as they emerged from the meanings, discourses, silences, and effects of the presented 'inclusion' issue in the Maltese compulsory schooling state system. The analysis focused on the first of Bacchi's questions to explore the proposed solutions by 'working backwards' to '*read off* the implied problem from the proposal' (Bacchi, 2009, p. 48, original emphasis). Table 1 contains a list of identified representations from the two policy documents presented in this chapter. Due to space constraints, I have included a single example of a proposed solution to illustrate each of the problem representations, based on the 'ten pillars/themes that will address the creation of a better inclusive learning friendly environment in schools' (PIES, p. 27), as identified in both documents and elaborated upon in NIEF (2019).

The problem represented in these policy documents is that of inclusion that does not fully serve the principles of equity and social justice, due to the selective nature of the present inclusive education system, the procedures, practices, and pedagogies of which fail to embrace diversity in all its forms and manifestations, still being very focused on students with overt SEN due to learning difficulties or physical disabilities, rather than having an education system that is genuinely accessible to all diverse students, whatever the diversity. This negative portraiture of inclusion in compulsory schooling is

Table 1.   Problem Representations of the Present State of Inclusion (and Equity) Identified in PIES (2019) and NIEF (2019).[1]

Solution Examples Identified from Policy Documents	Problem Representations The state of inclusion (and equity) at present
1. Leaders need to respond to increasing diversity in learner characteristics and abilities, cultural backgrounds, immigration status, different socio-economic status, disabilities, and variation in learning capacity (p. 22)	School leaders are *not exercising inclusive and strategic leadership* that is effective at giving prominence to equity and improved outcomes for *all* learners
2. Schools should examine existing priorities and analyse how one can contribute to the inclusive development of the school, including the necessary accommodations and modifications (p. 24)	The school is *not fully committed* to the inclusion of all learners and respect for diversity is not reflected in the school policies, practices, and procedures
3. A whole-school inclusive environment needs to take into consideration the principles of Universal Design for Learning … the learner's voice is given value … all learners are listened to (p. 26)	The learning environment is *still not accessible to all* due to physical and curricular/pedagogical barriers – some learners' voices are silenced or not loud enough
4. Parents are made to feel welcome at school and the collaboration … is central … The school acts as a lifelong learning centre … (p. 28)	Collaboration and communication with parents, as well as community engagement *unfold at a superficial level*
5. Planning for individual learner needs is a crucial aspect of whole school policy on inclusion … The plan devised will guide educators at classroom level to meet the particular needs … through modification of the mainstream curriculum (p. 30)	Inclusive education fails to provide challenging learning with realistic targets due to *poor/'non' modification of the 'mainstream curriculum'*
6. Curriculum design for inclusion is done through delivery of scaffolded lessons that motivate learner involvement, respecting different needs, abilities, and learning preferences (p. 32)	The curriculum is *not flexible* enough to offer a range of accessible and relevant learning opportunities for all learners – learning is not success-oriented
7. Promoting the well-being of all learners and staff at school is of primary importance. This is based on a rights perspective (p. 35)	Students and staff members are *not given adequate support* to ensure their overall wellbeing through a school holistic approach
8. Inclusive education is the responsibility of all education professionals and therefore training should be a priority. Teachers should gain knowledge and understanding on diverse challenges of learners so responsibility is shared in class rather than shifted onto the LSEs (p. 38)	There is no upskilling regarding dealing with diversity at pre- or in-service teacher education. Class teachers *shift responsibility of the 'student with needs'* on the LSE who is not trained to teach, but to facilitate

Table 1. (*Continued*)

Solution Examples Identified from Policy Documents	Problem Representations **The state of inclusion (and equity) at present**
9. This framework supports and promotes preventive strategies whereby the school supports all learners through positive behaviour management … including learners who present with social and emotional behavioural difficulties (p. 40)	The *school-wide support* provided to learners is *selective and exclusionary*
10. Support structures and services are essential in supporting educators, learners, and parents. These are diverse and often involve a range of different service professionals, approaches, and working methods (p. 42)	There is *not ample co-operation and co-ordination* between support services and schools, as well as parents due to lack of awareness and/or personnel

Note: ¹ Page numbers following policy excerpts in this table refer to NIEF (2019).

reinforced by the 'paradigm shift needed in thinking and action' (NIEF, 2019, p. 14) to overcome barriers that are: attitudinal, language and cultural, physical and environmental, training, systemic and organizational, and curricular. The presentation of these distinct barriers in tables, with the left-hand column listing barriers to be 'Moving From…' to the right-hand column listing a move 'Towards…' these barriers turned into opportunities, explicitly implies the presence of these barriers in the Maltese education system at large. The NIEF (2019) presents '*user friendly tools*' that will 'enable the schools to identify *areas to be improved* in their quest to have an inclusive community, celebrate positive achievements, as well as *rate their levels of inclusion* in order to *plan how wanting areas can be addressed and improved*' (p. 20, added emphasis). The NIEF (2019) 'is designed to provide a clear direction to schools on their journey towards inclusion', while 'inclusive education should cover all aspects of education', listing the various types of diverse learners it should be 'available and accessible' to (p. 11). Consequently, inclusive education is constructed as lacking, with echoes of the school effectiveness and improvement discourses, strongly present in the stated purposes of both policy documents as

> *a* comprehensive, structured *and* harmonized *guide … [for] a more* effective *and* efficient *education system. Inclusion, inclusive education and inclusive practices are fundamental for an* operative

and effective *education system … it is the duty of the Government and society at large to ensure that all citizens are given equitable prospects and experiences. (PIES, 2019, p. 4, added emphasis)*

The intention behind the complementary policy documents PIES (2019) and NIEF (2019) is to '*reduce the gaps* in educational outcomes, *increase participation* of learners, *support educational achievement* of all children and young people, and *raise the student attainment levels*' (NIEF, 2019, p. 5, added emphasis). Is the spotlight on the operationalization of effectiveness and efficiency for the narrowing of outcomes and attainment gaps shining in order to dim the values of equity, fairness and (social) justice, rather than to brighten them? Which discourses come to the fore in the 'inclusive' Maltese education system?

WPR Q2: What Presuppositions or Assumptions Underlie the Problem Representations Outlined Above?

In WPR Q2, the focus moves to seek 'meanings' within the policy documents, in order to problematize the construction of these 'discourses' and identify possible patterns that signal political or governmental rationalities in operation, in other words, power relations.

Inclusive education is constructed as a continuous developmental process that is transformative and gradual for the Maltese state education system. PIES (2019) defines inclusive education as a 'philosophy, process and implementation that *should* cover all aspects of education and *should* be *available* and *accessible* to *all* learners of *all* ages, including those *facing challenges*' (p. 11, added emphasis). Schools are expected 'to transform existing pedagogical, personal and professional beliefs, attitudes and discourse' while re-configuring 'processes and practices' for an effective response to '*all* learners' needs and social realities' (p. 11, original emphasis). This inclusion discourse goes beyond the learner, to target the educators and the school system itself who can engender equity via accessible schooling only if they are willing to adjust. Principles of 'equity' and 'inclusion' are at the core of these policy documents, with a focus on celebrating the various forms of diversity as they manifest themselves in primary and secondary classrooms: cognitive and learning; multiculturalism and language; religion and belief; socio-economic; gender and sexual; as well as physical and psychological. A broad meaning of inclusive education is adopted, one that moves from a learner-centred to a system-centred approach, leading to proactivity in the

identification of barriers and obstacles, and consequently a socially just education system fostering equity.

One can therefore detect competing and contradictory discourses within the policy documents, more specifically in the problem representations of inclusion and the solutions provided. Inclusion is initially constructed as a means to serve the state needs, in the provision of 'active', 'skilled', and 'employable' citizens via efficiency and effectiveness to 'proactivism' and 'system reform' for accessibility, in other words, equity. The policy documents also touch on neoliberal discourses in their promotion as a source of empowerment and information for education providers, while placing the onus of collective 'responsibility' and 'accountability' of all students' learning on the system that incorporates all the stakeholders in the schools' 'collaborative culture'. This is expected to unfold within the becoming 'inclusive community' of the wider Maltese society – 'a society in which belongingness, equity, diversity, and rights play a major role within our education system' (PIES, 2019, p. 5).

WPR Q3: How Has This Representation of the 'Problem' Come About?

WPR Q3 explores the practices producing the problem representation, which in this case would involve mapping the preceding policy documents, contexts, and practices referred to within the texts that led to the creation and production of both PIES (2019) and NIEF (2019).

Table 2 presents the main legislation and local and global documentation that identified the gaps in inclusion in the Maltese education system, thus leading to the production of the selected policy documents under exploration.

The two policy documents under exploration draw on a number of international commitments to the provision of Education for All to which Malta is a signatory, as propagated by the United Nations, UNESCO, and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (within the auspices of the Council of the European Union). While recognizing equity as a major international force driving the inclusive educational system movement, it acknowledges the OECD's (2012) two-dimensional notion of equity comprising fairness and inclusion. The local policy documents and legislation outlined in Table 2 gradually provided the philosophy and discursive framework around which PIES (2019) and NIEF (2019) are constructed, while simultaneously 'representing' the 'problem' of a wanting inclusive state education system for which these new policy documents provide solutions.

Table 2.   Policy Documents (Local and Global) Contributing to the Identification of the 'Problem' to Which PIES (2019) and NIEF (2019) Provide the 'Solution'.

Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014–2024 (MEDE, 2014a)	Outlines the four goals to equip all learners with employability and citizenship skills
Respect for All (MEDE, 2014b)	Encompasses UNESCO's (1996) four pillars of learning: learning to know/to do/to live together/to be, with a focus on human diversity education together with values-based education with a specific focus on social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity.
The National Curriculum Framework (MEDE, 2012)	Among other principles, it focuses on entitlement, personal growth, diversity, and inclusivity
Education for All: Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Malta: External Audit Report (European Agency for Special Needs & Inclusive Education, 2014)	Presents a critique of the inclusion concept in the Maltese education system while identifying areas for development and providing recommendations for the implementation of inclusion. This ties in with recommendations made by the Agency (2009) with regards to reciprocity and entwining of quality, inclusion, access, and equity
The Education Act (Cap. 327 of the Laws of Malta)	The law binds the Directorate for Educational Services with the duty to provide quality education to all learners, irrespective of their age, gender, sex, ability, economic status, nationality, ethnicity, religion or faith, disability and/or political affiliations
The Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act (Cap. 413 of the Laws of Malta)	This law states that it is expected that schools make reasonable adjustments to accommodate students with disabilities, for the elimination of discrimination
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)	This convention, ratified by Malta in 1990, demands that the voice of the child is heard in matters affecting them, with regards to the age and maturity of the child
The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994)	This calls on governments to commit to inclusive schooling and support the development of special needs education to provide equalization of opportunity by acknowledging that difficulties experienced by pupils come about due to the current school organization and rigid teaching methods

WPR Q4: What Is Left Unproblematic? Where Are the Silences? Can the 'Problem' Be Reconceptualized?

To answer WPR Q4, I attempt to 'destabilize' the 'existing problem representation' by seeking the 'silences, or unproblematized elements' and being 'inventive' (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 22) to think of different conceptualizations of inclusion and point to the dominance of presuppositions, if present.

The selected policy documents are very specific about the 'diversities' to be embraced in order to foster inclusion (thus leading to equity), presenting a 'Diversity Wheel' (PIES, 2019, p. 25) with six 'diverse needs' and then providing a list of potential learners falling under the umbrella of each 'diversity' (PIES, 2019, p. 26), claiming this transformation of schools into 'inclusive settings' to be geared 'towards a *socially just education* that aims to increase the system's ability to respond to all learners' diverse needs' (PIES, 2019, p. 25, added emphasis). This list of 'diverse' learners cannot be considered to be exhaustive of all learners, thus being exclusionary rather than serving as an 'inclusive' mechanism for the educators who are ultimately the policy actors. Examples of such missing, or missed, 'diversities' are learners hailing from 'unconventional' or 'out-of-the-norm' family situations such as those with adoptive parents; close relatives or elder siblings as guardians; single parents; members of the clergy or religious orders as primary carers, to mention a few. There is no mention of learners who are hospitalized, for example, or those suffering neglect and abuse. The exclusionary nature of this specificity is further highlighted by the absence of a mention of learners with multiple diversities, and hence the intersectionality of diversities. What is presented in the documents is a rather individualistic view of compartmentalized rather than contemporaneous diversities that may be of a permanent or temporary nature. How can this 'silo approach' foster the provision of an equitable and inclusive education system?

Not all educators are given the same prominence in the policy documents as the focus is mostly on teachers, with the onus being put on them to deliver teaching and learning suited to the needs of the learner. School leaders are mentioned when it comes to the exercise of 'inclusive and strategic leadership' and whole school development planning, while LSEs (who are assigned to statemented students on a 'one-to-one' or 'shared' basis) are only mentioned as part of the team comprising the statemented student's individual education planning. Proposed practices of collegiality, collaboration, and a whole-school approach are negated in and contradicted by the policy documents themselves in giving prominence to certain policy actors (and subjects) over others.

The framework for inclusive education is presented as a 'flexible' one that schools may adapt to their needs and the various 'diversities' present, while being able to exercise their autonomy. However, both policy documents, especially the framework (NIEF, 2019) are very rigid and didactic, presenting a list of 'diverse' learners, transformation of barriers, and inclusive best practice indicators, accompanied by a paternalistic and patronizing tone that gives the impression to the reader that the inclusive education model present in the Maltese state schools needs a complete overhaul due to its current ineffectiveness and inefficiency. Thus, the 'problem representation' of inclusion in the Maltese state school system emerges as very negative and lacking, when this may not be the case in all aspects related to inclusion and equity, and cannot be generalized across all primary and secondary state schools.

Both policy documents give too much prominence to 'disability' discourse, with a positive move towards 'diversity'; however not enough space has been allowed to discuss notions of equity and social justice and how these will be promoted via inclusion, inclusive practices and inclusive education. This absence belies the prominence given to the notions of 'Diversity', 'Rights', 'Access', and 'Equity' on the front cover of both policy documents.

WPR Q5: What 'Effects' Are Produced by This Problem Representation?

WPR Q5 invites me as researcher to consider the political implications of how the particular problems related to inclusion in the Maltese state education system are represented, with a consideration for three specific 'kinds' of effects that are discursive effects, subjectification effects, and lived effects (Bacchi, 2009).

My analysis of WPR Q4 suggests that silences and absences have discursive effects, setting boundaries, for example, around what counts as worthy of consideration when dealing with learner diversities that need to be embraced for an inclusive and equitable education system. Learners are constructed in such a way in the documents to be able to occupy the subject position of 'learners in need' due to either being 'at risk of exclusion' or emanating from 'targeted excluded groups' (PIES, 2019, p. 17). Educators, and their professional identities within the proposed inclusive education system are constructed in a manner that simultaneously aligns and subjectifies them to teaching and learning processes and procedures via a team approach, review of the national syllabi and equitable assessment methods, identification of barriers, as well as the provision of 'Disability Equality Training' for these

practices to be translated in the classroom. 'Structures' beyond the school, both intra- and inter-sectorial, construct the 'inclusive' teacher as reliant on 'professional expertise' beyond their control. These are examples of subjectification effects produced by the policy documents. The lived effects of the inclusion problem representation are not so visible in the policy documents, and further research on how equity and inclusion are unfolding in Maltese state schools is needed to explore this issue.

The identified 'unproblematizations' and 'effects' identified in WPR Q4 and Q5 point to potential areas for inclusion/equity policy development, generation, and reform, while encouraging us to think differently about how equity and inclusion can be distinctly understood, thus leading to 'diverse' solutions of the policy problem 'representations'.

WPR Q6: How and Where Has This Problem Representation Been Produced, Disseminated and Defended? How Can It Be Disrupted and Replaced?

This WPR question opens up the space for contestation, destabilization, and resistance of the current prevalent and imperious problem representations, pointing to areas that need to be further examined. Notwithstanding the fact that analysis of this WPR question was initiated in the previous two questions (Q4 and Q5) via the identified 'silences'/'absences' and 'effects', it will not be dealt with further here as I strongly believe that it merits empirical research among actors/subjects at policy reception and enactment levels for a full exploration, which goes beyond the scope of this chapter which focuses on the notion of equity as represented in Maltese education policy.

WPR Step 7: Apply This List of Questions to Your Own Problem Representations

The final step in the WPR framework involves self-reflexivity in the application of the above questions to my own proposals and problem representations, positioning my various selves within the analysis, thus subjecting my own thinking and philosophy to critical scrutiny. I acknowledge that my analysis of the notion of equity is influenced by my various selves as policy producer, receptor, subject, actor, and perpetrator due to my previous professional experience as Head of College Network in Malta, a top-level management ministerial position that involved the leadership, management, and governance of 13 primary

and secondary state schools. I consider myself to be at the triage of theory (my academic self), policy (my involvement in high-level ministerial meetings where we discussed draft versions of PIES and NIES ad nauseum), and practice (as a direct actor/observer of these two policies and their unfolding at school level). In fact, it is this leadership experience that allowed me to identify cracks and dysfunctions in social justice and equity through a juxtaposition of policy and practice, with a specific reference to migrant learners and students from poor social backgrounds (Mifsud, 2021). This small-scale empirical research led to this problematization of equity as represented in the policy documents meant to promote inclusion in the Maltese state school system. However, reflexivity and problematizing my own beliefs regarding equity and social justice, as well as my own experience of inclusion in the Maltese state schools, helped me distance my academic self from previous practitioner and policy selves to adopt a quasi-impartial stance. Nonetheless, bias is likely to remain.

Overall, Bacchi's method gave me the opportunity to adopt a methodical approach to my analysis, thus allowing me to ensure that prior assumptions could be scrutinized and limitations acknowledged.

CONCLUSIONS: RE-THINKING THE WAY FORWARD FOR EQUITY IN MALTESE EDUCATION POLICY?

In this small-scale study, I set out to explore how the policyscape makes provision for achieving, improving, and maintaining equity in compulsory state schooling in Malta, more specifically by analyzing national school inclusion policy in Malta utilizing Bacchi's WPR approach. This post-structural approach allows me to interrogate the solutions proposed to generate equity and the problem representations of inclusion in Maltese state schools via an analysis of the two policy documents (PIES, NIEF, 2019) specifically mobilized to address the problem of inequality, while highlighting the need for equity provision as a policy priority, especially as an EU member state.

The Maltese educational policy's understanding of equity embraces the OECD's (2012) definition of equity as embracing the inclusion and fairness principles, making specific references throughout both documents explicitly and implicitly. PIES (2019) and NIEF (2019) do not seem to exhibit confusion over 'inclusion' and 'equity' as principles, contrary to Ainscow's (2020a, 2020b) such claim about education equity discourse/s in general as the Government's education policy is driven by equity and quality, that is evidenced by an inclusive policy at compulsory school level. While still being very context-specific in its problem representation of the current state of inclusion

focusing on students with physical disabilities, the policy solutions provided for inclusive education to foster equity reflect UNESCO's (2017) principle of embracing diversity among all learners. This focus on the diversity discourse evidenced throughout both documents (as discussed in the preceding analysis) reflects the demographic change experienced in the wider Maltese society due to the relatively recent but quickly growing immigrant population.

The problem representations of the state of inclusion in the Maltese state education system (which thus leads to the absence of/lack of equity) reflect policy discourses centred on the presumption of inadequacy (Clarke, 2014), thus rendering current equity arrangements for the state as iniquitous and in dire need of reform. However, since it was not the scope of this chapter to explore the current state of equity in Maltese state schools or the enactment of the PIES (2019) and NIEF (2019) to explore the level of inclusion/equity unfolding in practice, further micro-level analysis is needed. As noted earlier, Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach is not concerned with identifying the policy-practice divide.

Despite WPR proving to be a labour-intensive process (as also noted by Tawell & McCluskey, 2022) and doubts raised about the usefulness of post-structural analysis, it has much to offer to the field of education policy due to its promotion of research as a political practice, encouraging problematizations and re-problematizations while generating critical reflexivity. This form of policy analysis promotes new forms of questions about 'problem' representations and production, authoritative knowledges, silences, and the subjectification and governmentality of policy actors and subjects (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). While acknowledging that a different method of policy analysis would have provided a different representation of equity in Maltese education policy, the WPR approach allowed me to problematize the representation of inclusion, question the solutions presented and consider alternatives. Other potential limitations presented by my positionality within the local education context have been addressed in my reply to WPR Q7.

The results of this small-scale study have theoretical and methodological implications for academics, policymakers, and practitioners in the educational policy field. The potential of Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach to problematize current policy problems, their construction and representation, and more importantly to think creatively about alternatives is exemplified through a worked example of policy analysis presented in this chapter. Furthermore, this study highlights the fact that there are a number of persistent challenges for achieving equity in education, especially the immigrant-native educational gap, despite European policy makers having been very active in the educational field, as evident in numerous educational reforms in the last decade (Hippe et al., 2016).

Education policies need to be re-thought to reduce inequity and inequality, while measuring policy impact and utilizing evidence-based research is also vital to policy making. In the words of Doucet and Pont (2021, n.p.), 'The start of the pandemic flipped the dynamic of policy makers and practitioners (educators) on its head' as educators sought solutions to meet the equity needs of learners while 'policy makers were playing catch-up' as governments tried to understand how to proceed with health protocols and education provision. The pandemic-induced school closures have provided a test of how education policy making is changing. What does it mean for equity and schooling???

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REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. *What do you understand by equity? Why is it needed in education?*
2. *How does equity feature in the policyscape of your particular education system up to compulsory school age level?*
3. *How can Bacchi's WPR framework help you problematize particular aspects and representation of education policy problems in your current education system?*
4. *What other approaches to policy analysis would help you explore whether particular national policy solutions are meeting the equity, inclusion and social justice needs of learners?*

FURTHER READING

1. **Bacchi, C., & Goodwin, S. (2016).** *Poststructural policy analysis: A guide to practice.* **Palgrave Macmillan.**

This book offers a novel, refreshing, and politically engaged way to think about public policy. Instead of treating policy as simply the government's best efforts to address problems, it offers a way to question critically how policies produce 'problems' as particular sorts of problems, with important political implications. Governing, it is argued, takes place through these problematizations. According to the authors, interrogating policies and policy proposals as problematizations involves asking questions about the assumptions they rely upon, how they have been made, what their effects are, as well as how they could be unmade. To enable this form of critical analysis, this book introduces an analytic strategy, the 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach. It features examples of applications of the approach with topics as diverse as obesity, economic policy, migration, drug and alcohol policy, and gender equality to illustrate the growing popularity of this way of thinking and to provide clear and useful examples of post-structural policy analysis in practice. It also includes an appendix that introduces a novel method of post-structural interview analysis focused on seven closely related processes.

2. **Ball, S. J. (2006).** *Education policy and social class: The selected works of Stephen J. Ball.* **Routledge.**

This book provides an overview of the long-lasting contributions Stephen Ball has made to the field of educational policy analysis. This volume contains 16 key essays divided into 3 sections: perspectives on policy research; policy technologies and policy analysis; and social class and education policy. Each chapter presents innovative ways of thinking about public policy, asking probing questions about what policy is, how policy is influenced and what effects intentional and unintentional policies have. As a body of work, this collection raises issues of ethics and social justice which are often neglected in the mass of policies that now affect every aspect of our education systems.

3. **Ball, S. J. (2016). (Ed.).** *Michel Foucault and education policy analysis.* **Routledge.**

The work of Michel Foucault has become a major resource for educational researchers seeking to understand how education makes us what we are. In this book, a group of contributors explore how Foucault's work is used in a variety of ways to explore the 'hows' and 'whos' of education policy – its

technologies and its subjectivities, its oppressions and its freedoms. The book takes full advantage of the opportunities for creativity and flexibility that Foucault's ideas and methods offer to researchers in deploying genealogy, discourse, and subjectivation as analytic devices. This book was originally published as a special issue of the *Journal of Education Policy*.

4.   **Stacey, M., & Mockler, N. (2024). (Eds.).** *Analysing education policy: Theory and method*. **Routledge**.

This book provides a comprehensive overview of key approaches in critical education policy research. With chapters from internationally recognized and established scholars in the field, readers have access to an authoritative account of how different questions may be approached and answered. Part 1 features chapters focused on text-based approaches to analysis, including critical discourse analysis, thinking with Foucault, indigenist policy analysis, media analysis, the analysis of promotional texts in education, and the analysis of online networks. Part 2 features chapters focused on network ethnography, actor-network theory, materiality in policy, institutional ethnography, decolonizing approaches to curriculum policy, working with children and young people, and working with education policy elites. Critical education policy analysis takes many different forms, each of which works with distinctly different questions and fulfils different purposes. This book maps current common and influential approaches to answering these questions, providing important guidance for both new and established researchers.