In one of the more interesting moments in education policy, Michael Gove, M.P., previous secretary of education in England (2010-2014), referred to opponents of his education policy reforms as The Blob: a collective and amorphous conglomerate seemingly impervious to attack yet swallowing all in its wake, including the fate of English students. Gove’s reference was to a 1950s b-grade science fiction film, and helped to set a subsequently antagonistic tone to his time in the role of secretary of education, characterised by acrimony in public debate about education and education policy. Representing his problems in this way, Gove was innovative in instigating a new kind of logical fallacy: an ab blobinem fallacy (a group version of the ad hominem fallacy), attacking The Blob not the arguments.

While seemingly a media stunt convincing the legitimate concerns of an increasingly wide circle of groups in the UK, this presentation takes this event as representative of a larger and globally travelling phenomena in which discussions about education and education research may be viewed as agonistic (Mouffe 2014), and presented as a kind of mediated spectacle with set pieces, opponents and plots (Papadopoulos 2013). The concern for education researchers is that debates about education policy - such as Gove’s comments about The Blob - are located in and framed by the fields of journalism, in newspapers, radio broadcasts and TV programs in which access of researchers is limited and potentially treacherous. With increasing emphasis in research exercises on the impact of education research, increased scrutiny of research funds and decreased funding, where does this leave education researchers? This presentation draws on this debate to discuss what might be called the social contract for education research, when considered as both a national social contract and as a global social contract. While intended as a provocation, the presentation draws on three research projects related to mediatization, contractualism and globalisation to discuss the consequences of viewing education research through social contract analysis (Rawolle, 2013).

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