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Policy Processes in Education:
A Possible Research And Development Agenda

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In the context of a visible increase in policy research output without an identifiable community of educational policy researchers having formed yet in Australia, this paper outlines a possible research and development agenda that would foster cooperation among interested researchers through a Special Interest Group on Policy Processes in Education established within the Australian Association for Research in Education. The intention is to develop a specialized forum for communication and exchange among interested researchers, across a spectrum of theoretical and methodological approaches, that would improve the quality and relevance of the output in policy research. The forum would also improve the quality of educational and training offerings currently offered under the 'education policy' label, and strengthen the link between educational policy researchers and policy makers. A variety of institutional foci are encouraged, including early childhood education, school systems, higher education, TAFE, distance education and open learning. The agenda is illustrated by examples of scholarly work in Australia and overseas, followed by plans for possible action.

Close to the heart of scholarly work, a primary focus of the agenda is on improving the research enterprise itself. We believe our focus on 'policy processes' rather than on a generic 'policy research' could enhance the 'enlightenment' function of policy research, as well as alerting policy makers to new problems and new perspectives on policy problems. The focus on policy processes, that is on policy formation, implementation and evaluation, could also improve the instrumental or applied orientation of research. Social problems amenable to policy solutions could be better identified. The evaluation of current policy initiatives could be refined. The production of pragmatic, action oriented recommendation to policy makers is emphasised here. Finally, all agenda components aim at improving the quality and effectiveness of the relation between policy research and policy making.

Context: Scholarship and Markets

In 1986 the University of Wollongong formed the School of Policy and Technology Studies in Education, which offered a specialization in

'educational policy' at Master and PhD level. In the years that followed an increasing number of Australian universities introduced for the first time the word 'policy' in the titles of their departments of education and postgraduate educational offerings. For example, the University of Sydney formed a Department of Social and Policy Studies in Education in 1988. In 1989 the ARC introduced the term 'policy' in its official taxonomy of educational research foci. The 'policy' heading had never surfaced before in maps of educational research areas in Australia (Connell, 1980, Musgrave, 1985)¹. The 1991 Strategic Review of Research in Education (McGaw, 1992) identified 'Educational Policy' as one of the priorities indicated by the submissions to the review. The number of submissions ranked at about midway between the area with the maximum number of submissions (Equity and Social Justice)

and those with the least submissions (Research Performance Indicators, Overseas Students, Music Education, Analysis of Overseas Research). In 1994, the ACER, the oldest organization for educational research in Australia, has restructured itself into two subdivisions, one of them formally titled 'Policy Research'. By contrast, in 1994 there is still no specialized journal on educational policy in Australia, nor is there a formal association of researchers electing to identify with the label.

The sequence of events runs somewhat at variance with historical accounts of the development of most other research areas. Here 'bottom up' researcher-generated drives have appeared to prevail. Commonly, founding of Chairs and Departments in universities and the offerings of specialized Degrees have been preceded by, or have at least been seen as associate with the formal constitution of communities of scholars clearly identifiable by their particular themes and approaches, and the publication of specialized research journals (Barnes, 1972; Bechtel, 1986; Wiggershaus, 1994). Growth of some educational research areas bear the same mark (Husen, 1984; Balduzzi, 1986). Also, customarily, one's identification as a scholar has been found to predominate in self-identities of academics, well before their institutional affiliation (Piper, 1992), even though it is through institutionalization that communities of researchers have traditionally sought professional status (Whitley, 1977; Piper 1992).

The apparently 'top down' institutional development of educational policy studies in Australia suggests the prevalence of a market-driven process over a scholarship-driven one. The growth appears to be at variance with the sister development in the US, where at least one specialized policy journal has been in existence since 1978 (Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis) concomitant with, if not preceding institutional initiatives. In the mid 80s, a yet clearer policy focus was declared in the titles of new academic journals in Europe (Journal of Education Policy) and the US (Educational Policy). In his keynote address at the 1988 Annual National Conference of the

Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society, the noted historian Harold Silver marvelled at the proliferation of research centres on 'education policy' found in the US during his recent tour of the country, often with membership of only a handful of researchers.

By 1993, US education policy researchers had achieved enough focus and interest to create their own telecommunication network (EDYPOLAN), accessible from all over the world through Internet and other webs.

Are these the signs that a community of researchers in educational policy studies has developed overseas, but not yet in Australia? Do we have to conclude that there is very little research in educational policy in Australia? Too little to ensure a sound research base for the degrees offered in educational policy? Too little to make it a regular practice for policy makers to seek policy advice from native researchers?

A preliminary search for answering the first query (Are there education policy researchers in Australia?) could use the suggestion of Steve Fuller concerning the identification of putative 'disciplines' which are 'bounded'. Whilst Fuller's approach does not necessarily provide an adequate characterization of a discipline from an epistemological point of view² it does provide a reasonable way of identifying an academic community conscious of researching a specific area of study, such as educational policy. Fuller claims that

'... a discipline is 'bounded' by its procedure for adjudicating knowledge claims. This procedure consists of an argumentation format

that restricts (i) word usage, (ii) borrowing permitted from other disciplines, and (iii) appropriate contexts of justification/discovery. (Fuller, 1988: 191).

The search for a community of educational policy researchers could therefore start with an exploration of word usage. Intuitively, one of the most prominent word-signs to be expected from such a community would be the frequency of particular expressions including the word 'policy' in their publications. This was done in 1993 by a team of researchers³, with a focus on public policy research, rather than solely on education. Their search of three data bases⁴ reveals an intriguing picture (Figure 1)⁵. The particular 'policy' search string used was constructed to tap, in an exploratory fashion, both the first and third of Fuller's criteria, that is word usage within contexts of justification/discovery. Three features appear as prominent in the outcome:

- a) many more educational journals appear to qualify as indicators of a hypothetical policy research community than those explicitly addressing policy in their title;
- b) none of the three 'educational policy' journals (Educational

Evaluation and Policy Analysis, Educational Policy, Journal of Education Policy) shows the highest number of entries; c) the maximum number of entries found does not exceed four entries, an impressively small output for journals, each of which has published between 150 and 200 articles in the period surveyed⁶.

At face value, these results could suggest two features of our hypothetical community of educational policy researchers, internationally. One is that it is dispersed rather than clearly consolidated in specific journals⁷, thus indicating that a collective 'policy' research identity has yet to emerge⁸. The assumption of a widespread lack of identification with the 'policy' label is further supported by a survey of authors' identities in the search. Of the 46 entries in the search, only two are from the same author (Douglas Mitchell), while all the others are from a different author each. To strengthen the impression of a 'dispersed' community even further, neither of the Mitchell papers are from 'educational policy' journals. The second characteristic of our hypothetical community of educational policy researchers is that the constellation observed is not just of people, but also of disciplines. If the search string taps Fuller's first and third criteria, any cursory survey of the journals identified in the search suggests unmistakably that authors tend to explore policy issues from a range of disciplinary perspectives, using a range of terminologies.

The first question put at the outset can now be answered, at least tentatively. With the likely exception of US, no consolidated community of educational policy researchers appears to exist internationally.

The discerning reader would not miss the fragility of the arguments presented so far. The validity of the search depends closely on the search string selected. From Fuller's standpoint it could be said that the terminology of this string is not necessarily what a hypothetical community of educational policy researchers would have adopted for itself. Differently worded searches could have yielded different results.

Another search has therefore been conducted in October 1994, to explore this possibility. This time the string is the most general possible. It contains only one word: 'policy'. In this the search reflects the

commonsensical assumption that journals explicitly focussing on educational policy in their title would have the word used more frequently than those which do not. The use of the sole word 'policy' in the search provides also some assurance that the search cuts across eventual discipline boundaries, that is eventual boundaries in terminology.

Because of limitations in time and resources, the second search covers only a limited number of the journals identified in the first search, besides the three journals with the words 'educational policy' in their titles. Furthermore, to introduce a more specific Australian focus (Is there an educational policy research community in Australia?) the list of three educational policy journals searched has been expanded to include Australian journals of wide diffusion (The Journal of Educational Administration, the Australian Journal of Education, Discourse and Unicorn). The search was also restricted to only one of the data bases of the first search: ERIC. A second data base, the Australian Educational Index, was included to survey Australian journals not covered by ERIC. Figure 2 shows the results of the second search.

As it can be expected, the generality of the search terms leads to a much higher number of entries detected – the entries for the highest scoring Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis jumps from 3 to 90 between searches. The overall pattern of the first search is however confirmed. Only two out of three 'educational policy' journals show the highest number of entries. Several other education journals show high incidence of the use of the word 'policy' in their data base records. The Australian journals behave similarly to other educational journals in the search, with Discourse sharing with the equally non-policy specific European Journal of Education the top 55 per cent of entries per journal.

If the use of the word 'policy' can be taken to indicate a research focus on policy, the second search broadly confirms the outcome of the first search, with some provisos and extensions:

- the high number of entries in Journal of Education Policy could indicate that a community of educational policy research is emerging internationally, besides the one possibly identified in the US;
- the high number of entries in Discourse,, and the publication of a first issue of the Journal of Education Policy devoted to educational policy research in Australia⁹ suggest that a core of Australian researchers with a primary focus on policy could be forming¹⁰;
- the number of entries in the four Australian educational journals indicates that a constellation of educational researchers with at least a secondary focus on educational policy may exist in Australia, covering a range of disciplinary standpoints.

In short, the first question asked at the outset can tentatively be answered: With the likely exception of US, no consolidated community of educational policy researchers appear to exist internationally, although evidence suggests that a core of educational policy researchers could exist in Australia. Here, a constellation of educational researchers with at least a secondary focus on policy would appear to add to the core group.

Putting one hesitant step after another, the analysis can now tackle the other original questions: Is Australian research on policy sufficient to ensure a sound research base for the degrees offered in educational policy? Is it sufficient to make it a regular practice for policy makers to seek policy advice from native researchers?

Let's start with the second question. Reports on the expert status enjoyed by educational researchers in the policy-making community, including by researchers of policy, are that the status is not very high. Claims of faults locate them mostly within the research community itself, its inadequate methodologies (Rowe, 1992), its lack of understanding of the policy process (Walker, 1992), its bias towards school system to the detriment of the TAFE and higher education sectors (Marginson, 1992), and the paucity of useful answers for educational practitioners (Poole, 1992).

This knowledge context only aggravates possible conclusions on the first question. Research efforts clarifying fundamental questions about epistemologies (e.g. Evers & Lakomski, 1991) or policy education (e.g. Fasano, 1990 and 1991) are scarce. Even scarcer is knowledge about what universities are actually teaching in their 'educational policy'-titled degrees. Scarcity itself gives the game away here: possibly, current educational policy curricula in Australia are as much fragmented as the observed constellation of researchers, an aggregate of idiosyncratic elements from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds. If this is the case, it is doubtful that such training is producing the kind of policy researcher and analyst in demand from policy makers. It is also doubtful that such training could provide sound basis for the literacy level competence on policy processes advocated for all educational researchers in order for them to become credible stakeholders in the educational policy arena, debating and defending their stakes (Walker, 1992) and their values (Crittenden, 1990) with policy makers and other stakeholders.

It has been argued often that changes in education should have a research base (Porter, 1993). Changes in educational policy, its formulation, implementation, evaluation and change, should also have a base in policy research. So should the training of researchers in policy and the training of professionals who will analyse policy issues and advise policy makers. The signs are that such a research base is not strong enough as yet. Evidence reported in this paper confirms the findings from the national review of educational research (McGaw, 1992) that a research base in policy is relatively scarce in Australia. There are simply no signs of an output large and coherent enough from researchers with a primary or secondary focus on educational policy to ensure a sound research base for decision on policy changes in education and an equally sound curriculum for both researchers and practitioners training in educational policy.

Few would argue against the claim that there is a need to improve this state of affairs. Data also indicate that improvement would not be out of reach. A number of Australian researchers can already be identified with educational policy as primary or secondary focus, albeit under different disciplinary labels. How to enlarge the group and its production? How to ensure that coherence is increased as well as volume? How to bolster investments in policy education and training? How to bring current research expertise to identify priority topics in educational policy? How to encourage a sufficient mass of educational researchers to concentrate coherently on the priorities identified? How to establish communication between policy makers and policy researchers so that initiatives and products satisfy both communities? Finally, when living in times when professionalism is achieved increasingly through academic qualifications (Abbott, 1988) and when even policy makers agree on the need for such training in their ranks (Fasano, 1991), how to strike the appropriate balance between scholarship and market needs? How to avoid the risk of producing graduates in educational policy while leaving the knowledge

base lagging behind?

These are the questions that have spurred the idea of the Special Interest Group presented in this paper. Its objectives are several and tiered. At the most basic level there is the objective to take stock of and support the quality of the educational policy research effort, that is the availability and quality of the analytical tools (theory and methodology) for the study of policy, across policy areas. This objective is closely linked to the aim of taking stock of and supporting the quality of the training of policy researchers and analysts.

The second tier objectives concern the status and influence of educational research policy in the wider research community. Although not canvassed in the arguments so far, it goes without saying that none of the above will be achieved without appropriate funding. Improved credibility with policy makers is likely to increase procurement and solicitation funds¹¹. Increase in assistance funds depends from an enlarged group of stakeholders yet. Policy makers might influence the aggregated funds available for investigator-initiated research. Its allocation across research communities however is strongly influenced also by their comparative socio-epistemic status (Fasano, 1993). The dominant applied nature of educational research, on policy or otherwise, tends to place researchers at a distinct disadvantage here. This Special Interest Group addresses this issue as well through the achievement of, among others, the first tier objectives.

Other objectives at this level include heightening of efficiency and visibility of educational researchers in the policy arenas, through a

direct advocacy function, as well as increasing the level of policy awareness and literacy in the general community of educational researchers and practitioners, in view of improving their participation in and influence on policy developments.

When considered against the backdrop of the evidence given, no reader would miss some fundamental challenges implied by the SIG's objectives.

On one hand, the relative scarcity of educational policy researchers in Australia makes a degree of pooling indispensable. On the other hand, researchers attached to their original discipline are likely to resist pooling. How to safeguard researchers' socio-epistemic identity and autonomy while achieving on-task focussing and concentration is a first challenge the SIG needs to face.

The second challenge is related to the first. The achievement of higher socio-epistemic status through a strong scholarly effort of the highest quality is high on the SIG's agenda, as it is expected to produce the highest yield, with other researchers and with policy makers. Product quality, both basic and applied, as well as resource baseline depend on it. The choice of focus for the SIG is strategically important here. It needs to be of a kind to enthuse researchers with the widest range of policy interests and disciplinary affiliations to pool resources in large enough numbers and for long enough to make a difference in the socio-epistemic status of educational policy research and in their credibility with policy makers. The identification of an appropriate research focus is the second major challenge faced by the SIG.

The remainder of the paper considers how these challenges could be met.

Cohabitation and Beyond

A first hypothesis developed in this paper is that we are witnessing the development of a policy interest in Australia within a constellation of established research communities, with each bringing its original focus and argumentation format (Fuller, 1988) to bear on policy related issues, as identified through its idiosyncratic discipline filters.

The evidence on the absence of policy-specialized educational research association and academic journal in Australia, and on the multiplication of university departments and degrees tagged with the 'educational policy' label, suggests a second hypothesis: the emergence of educational policy studies in Australia is being driven by market more than by scholarly interests¹². A corollary is that current curricula in educational policy are likely to be as fragmented as the disciplinary approaches represented.

Of course, current research fragmentation is not necessarily an issue to be apprehensive about. History of science provides enough examples of foci adopted concurrently in a range of disciplines, some of which, when the focus has potential and the time is right, converge spontaneously to produce new insights and understanding. Nor it is necessarily an issue whether market interests can be brought in line with scholarly, that is quality, concerns. In a customer driven economy, product mediocrity is not inevitably an impediment to expanding markets. The issue here is rather an instrumental one: whether the apparent fragmentation is detrimental to the achievement of specific goals, such as the development of a native policy research culture and professionalism, with its corollary of credible research and professional training courses in educational policy.

Leaving the market issue for institutions to consider, the SIG concentrates on the question of research fragmentation. Its resolve in this respect is that there is little time to wait for spontaneous convergence. Active steps should be taken to hasten the process. The position is justified by the recognized urgent need to improve research in education in general and in educational policy in particular, by taking better account of the inherent complex and dynamic nature of education and policy (e.g Crittenden, 1990; Walker, 1992; Marginson, 1993).

Few would dispute the contention that the outcomes from policy research and analysis¹³ depend heavily on the theories and methodologies adopted. Fewer yet would deny that any one of the approaches used in educational policy research and analysis accounts for only part of the policy situation. Economic approaches tend to focus almost exclusively on economic variables, approaches from political science would rather select factors of power and power relations, critical approaches focus heavily on questions of value, and so on. When the policy situation under scrutiny is mostly influenced by one or the other type of monodisciplinary factor, the monodisciplinary policy researcher will do a reasonably competent job. When the policy situation is more complex than, or at variance with, any given set of monodisciplinary approaches, the outcome of monodisciplinary policy research and analysis could be so incomplete as to be wrong altogether.

Multidisciplinarity, multiperspectivism, multimethod are buzz words in current educational research. They should be all the more so in educational policy research. The task facing researchers here is to become aware of the actual complexity of what they investigate and to make an effort at identifying and incorporating the 'missing dimensions' or aspects of their focus area. The inevitable problems of coherence, coordination and integration across the array of theories

and methodologies brought to bear on the policy issue will also have

to be faced, eventually.

The SIG proposes a range of approaches to the task. The safeguard of epistemic identity and autonomy while achieving convergence would remain paramount throughout. So would the variety of educational policy sectors represented: early childhood education, schools, TAFE, higher education, open learning, distance education and so on. The approaches contemplate different forms of sharing, communicating and converging across groups of mono-disciplinary researchers. They can be ranked on a dimension of increasing interaction from exposure and teamwork to integration proper.

Exposure indicates the kind of interaction whereby the monodisciplinary researchers become aware of other monodisciplinary work in policy research and analysis – through common seminars, for instance. Dialogue and debate with colleagues would progressively develop an understanding of other approaches, including their technical language and conceptual frameworks. The development of a common level of policy literacy would start here. At appropriate times, the audience could include interested policy practitioners so as to introduce their experiential knowledge (Mattesich, 1978) to enrich the debates.

Teamwork activities would move one step closer to multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity. The label indicates the type of interaction whereby a team of different monodisciplinary researchers works jointly on a policy research project. By so doing, the researchers acquire a deeper knowledge of each other's vision of the policy world – some kind of core literacy of other research traditions – in the shortest time. The objective of this mode of activity is to develop products reflecting the approaches from a number of disciplines, that is a product recognizing the largest possible range of dimensions or components of the policy situation under study. Incidentally, this mode of interdisciplinarity is the most commonly found in reality, where '... researchers who fundamentally retain their disciplinary identity ... pursue work that involves utilizing and interacting with another discipline' (Bechtel, 1986: 29). Research on instances of interdisciplinary work has led to identifying some major motivations researchers appear to hold when crossing disciplinary boundaries. A brief survey of these might assist researchers pondering on whether or not to enter teamwork activities. Such motivations include:

- '... a recognition that the problem one is encountering cannot be adequately dealt with within one's own discipline';
- '... acquisition of guidance in developing theoretical explanation';
- '... awareness of incommensurability in the approaches to the same domain by different disciplines.' followed by a response of intensifying interdisciplinary contacts 'in the hope that the dialectical interaction might advance the understanding in both enterprises';

- '... trying to explain the origin of a phenomenon that has traditionally fallen within the domain of one discipline, but where the origin requires entering the domain of another discipline' (Bechtel, 1986:31-2)

In short, the form of teamwork proposed here is somewhat akin to achieving Peter Fensham's 'shared common sense knowledge' (1993) among researchers with an interest on educational policy. It is worth also remembering that quality of final product, especially its relevance and validity, would depend on the inclusion of expert policy practitioners in the team.

Finally, integration, the more advanced form of interaction could also be aimed at by a multidisciplinary educational policy research group. Its objective is to engage over time in an epistemic analysis of the various monodisciplinary approaches to policy studies in order to identify possible common elements across disciplines, that is recognizing possible 'ontological connection' (Bechtel, 1986: 42), across policy processes and policy instances, individually or by categories of policies. Constant contrasting scholarly knowledge with the experiential knowledge of outstanding policy practitioners would also be essential during this phase.

Each form of activity would provide knowledge to be communicated to both policy researchers (the knowledge production market) and practitioners (the knowledge users market), in a clearly structured and possibly integrated form, and eventually included in pre-service as well as in-service education and training courses.

Once modes of interaction are decided upon, it is quite necessary to clarify the focus of the work. What would be the priorities meeting the needs of policy and other decision makers in education, while ensuring also the highest socio-epistemic gains to researchers? Given the possibly fragmented nature of the group of educational researchers available, what would be the focus that allows maximum participation and cooperation? The next section endeavours to answer these questions.

Focussing on Policy Processes in Education

There is little doubt that investments in theory and methodology building allow for higher socio-epistemic gains. There is even less doubt that policy practitioners need problem based research most. To search for solution to the dilemma it is advisable to exit the community of educational policy research and expand the analysis in this paper to a larger community of policy researchers, where solutions have been developed for some time now. Figure 3 allows a glimpse of

such community, focussing on all sectors of public policy, including education.

The Figure shows the outcome of the 1993 search, when no limit is put on journal titles. No longer confined to journals with the word 'education' in their title (Figure 1), the distribution of entries changes quite dramatically. To the extent that the 1993 search string taps at Fuller's criteria identifying a 'bounded' discipline, Figure 3 shows how the community of public policy researchers has been much more active at developing its 'word usage' and at investigating fundamental issues in policy research. A group of journals with between five and fifteen entries expands the distribution curve upward from Figure 1, to achieve a better fit with Bradford Law. The community of public policy researchers interested in theoretical and methodological issues appears to publish mostly in a small number of journals, where, interestingly, the situation in Figure 1 is reproduced: the appearance of the word 'policy' in the journal title does not necessarily ensure a higher position in the ranking.

Browsing through these journals produces further support to the objectives and arguments set out in this paper. Indeed multidisciplinary is not only advocated but achieved in a number of instances. The papers reflect not just a range of research traditions but a range of policy instances as well, across sectors of policy. Higher socio-epistemic gains are aimed at through theory-building

efforts. Policy practitioners are frequent audiences if not partners in research. Among the most telling signs of the extent to which such features are now firmly established in the community are the recommendations to prospective authors given in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (JPAM, vol.13, no.3, 1994, p.627-8). Here 'feature articles' are sought just as much as 'insights' and 'curriculum and case notes'. Priority in 'Feature articles' is given to papers that relate

... their conclusion broadly to a number of substantive fields of public policy or that deal with issues of professional practice in policy analysis and educational management. Although an interdisciplinary perspective is usually most appropriate, articles that employ the tools of a single discipline are welcome if they have substantive relevance and if they are written for a general rather than disciplinary audience.

Stock taking is also favoured: 'The editors welcome proposals for articles that review the state of knowledge in particular policy areas'. Novelty is sought as well as experiential understanding for the 'insights' section: 'The editors seek short articles .. that present novel policy ideas, challenge common wisdom, report surprising research findings, draw lessons from experience ...'. Education and

training is not forgotten either. For the 'curriculum and case note' section the editors

believe that JPAM should play a role in improving professional education in policy analysis and public management and therefore welcome short articles that deal with broad issues of curriculum or specific aspects of pedagogy. The latter includes description of particularly valuable exercises and cases.

Finally, questions of word usage are clarified: authors should

bear in mind ... that JPAM's fundamental purpose is to promote more effective communication among those interested in policy analysis and public management. Many of these people will be academics; but some will be executives in the public service, and some interested laymen. ... It is best to avoid the kind of shorthand and jargon that is understood exclusively by specialists operating in a narrow field.

The community so identified suggests ways to solve the dilemma of combining socio-epistemic gains with credibility advantages with policy makers. Two have already been mentioned in this paper, multidisciplinary and multisectorialism. Educational researchers with a range of mono-disciplinary affiliations join in focussing on particular policy issues in education. All sectors of education, schools, TAFE, higher education and the like, are represented amongst the policy issues selected. The community of public policy researchers also points at a way to maximise research outcomes. Researchers no longer stop at considering single policies and sectors in their work. They now tend to move a step upward in the epistemic way, and use their single policy and sector studies as a building blocks to generalize to other policies and sectors. They go beyond assessing what is specific to the policy and the sector, and move to investigate what is common across policies and sectors. The trend is grounded on the 'discovery' that real life policy instances are much more complex and dynamic than what was believed until recently and that aspects of policy hitherto believed to be separate and separable in the analysis are in fact more than loosely connected¹⁵. One way to achieve generalization is to include in specific studies a focus on a common element across studies, that of policy processes.

The study of policy process builds on research on a range of policy instances is the focus proposed by this SIG. Its definition includes the formation and formulation of policy, its implementation, evaluation and change. For the purpose of this SIG this widely accepted definition is expanded to include the process of policy research and analysis itself, a focus still dealt with separately in most studies of policy (e.g. White, 1994)

Its potential for theory building and methodology development makes the focus on policy process suitable to ensure socio-epistemic gains among researchers. Its transferability across policy instances facilitates knowledge growth on any specific policy across educational sectors. Its complexity facilitates grouping of interested researchers from different disciplinary standpoint. Finally, the distinctiveness of such focus fits well with strategies proposed by some sociologists of science (Fuller, 1993) to establish the SIG's legitimacy within the community of other researchers as well as with policy practitioners:

A significant part of carving out a disciplinary stake ... is to establish a distinctive intellectual context of research (Bechtel, 1986:26)

Linking up With Policy Makers

Researchers and the research enterprise have been at the forefront of the analysis so far. The paper has dealt in some detail with the nature and merit of current knowledge base in educational policy research and related postgraduate education and training. The nature of socio-epistemic factors governing the likely behaviour of particular policy research communities has also been given substantial space in the overall picture drawn to justify the vision and goals of the SIG on educational policy processes. The privileged focus has signalled the indispensable prerequisite of the SIG: its grounding on substantial academic foundations. The requirement has influenced the preliminary answers to the original questions on the existence of a community of educational policy researchers in Australia and its impact on the knowledge base of the growing number of degrees marketed by higher education institutions under the 'educational policy' label. To complete our original task it is now appropriate to focus squarely on the remaining question: is the research base in educational policy sufficient in quality and scope to make it a regular practice for policy makers to seek policy advice from native researchers?

The presence and role of policy makers in policy research have been alluded to in the previous pages, especially when outlining modes of cooperation among researchers, which - it is claimed - should include policy makers. This section takes off from these preliminary statements and pursues in some detail the discussion on why such cooperation should take place. The subsequent section (A possible research and development agenda) outlines possible ways on how researchers could link up with policy makers, while achieving cooperation among themselves in focussing on the other issues identified in this paper.

First, it is necessary to clarify responsibilities in establishing the connection. The SIG takes a clear stance on this: the responsibility lies, in the first instance, with researchers. For links to be

intellectually responsible, credibility with policy makers needs to be achieved in ways which maintain epistemic identity and methodological rigour in research. We suggest the starting point for satisfying

simultaneously the needs of policy makers and the academic standards of researchers is to approach the former from a methodologically coherent research point of view and we believe this can be done. It is firstly an intellectual task of matching the language, conceptual schemes and constraints of the two groups.

Now, studies of successful impact of research on practice have found that this tends to occur when, amongst other things, research methods suit the practical decision making situations and processes and are consistent with the beliefs and expectations of decision makers (Cousins & Leithwood, 1986). Moreover, Nisbet & Broadfoot (1980) have argued that when it comes to the impact of research on policy, impact is greatest when research fits the way policy problems are being framed. We have what has been called 'touchstone' (Walker, 1985, 1992; Crump, 1993) or problems, theories and standards shared between researchers and policy makers. We are arguing that is the responsibility, in the first place, of researchers to discover or construct this touchstone.

This suggests that research aiming to have a positive impact on educational policy should be problem-based and at least articulate with the concrete situations and thinking processes of policy makers. This does not mean that problem-based research should be uncritical or captive to fixed political or bureaucratic agendas; rather that it engage meaningfully with policy makers, creating a critical dialogue (Robinson, 1993) between them and researchers. Both sides are open, through discovery and construction of touchstone, to learning and change in critical dialogue; they engage in it when it looks like helping them solve their problems and achieve their goals.

There is a sense in which such research is market-driven: it deals with the needs of policy makers and they might be expected to fund much of it. There is an important difference, however, between this approach and much current market driven research which is directed towards uncritically meeting the stated requirements of policy makers and administrators. For problem-based research with a critical component there would need to be a more equal, continuing and open relationship between policy makers and policy researchers. It is in large part this relationship which is a major concern of this paper. It will enable research to influence policy in a more profound and lasting way than discreet pieces of research responding one by one to particular policy needs. It is in keeping with our concern with policy processes, and our proposal that a major focus of the SIG should be on policy processes. Thus this research agenda is both market driven and academically autonomous, and directed at furthering the enlightenment function of

educational research. The point we are making could be put another way: the fundamental intellectual agenda of educational policy researchers, to understand and explain policy processes and structures in education, can go only so far without the collaboration of policy makers.

A first step for policy researchers, therefore, is to understand the beliefs and expectations, the decision situations and the problems of policy makers. This essentially action-based perspective needs to be fundamental to policy research. It will uncover what Argyris and Schon (1974) have called the "theories of action" of policy makers. Such an understanding is best produced through research which tests hypotheses about policy makers' theories of action through discussion with the policy makers themselves, checking the hypotheses with the policy actors, so to speak. The appropriate methods are qualitative, and require systematic and iterative respondent validation. Within this context, there is room, indeed there is an essential requirement, for the multidisciplinary, multiperspectivism and multimethods which we

have acknowledged and applauded. It enables us to consider and evaluate research approaches and make sound judgements about which designs and methods are appropriate for which problems and issues (Argyris, Putnam and McLain-Smith, 1985). One medium to long term benefit could well be better informed judgements by policy makers about which kinds of research to commission for particular policy needs.

Much current "policy sociology" contains work seeking to understand the backgrounds, beliefs and expectations of policy makers, and the political contexts in which they work, but on its own falls short of being problem-based, tending to be used to produce, as an end goal, a critique of policy rather than intervention in policy processes to promote educational improvement. For example, much of the work of Ball and his colleagues in the UK (e.g. Ball, 1990) provides an informative analysis and balanced critique of educational policy actors and processes. Sometimes, however, such research can tend to set researchers at odds with policy makers: a good example, though not specifically on educational policy is Pusey's widely noted book *Economic Rationalism in Canberra* (1991). Critique will certainly be important to promote improvement, but it needs to be closely related to a sympathetic understanding of the decision situations and policy problems confronting policy practitioners, and the constraints within which they act. It is vital to understand the notion of policy constraints and the importance of a thorough analysis of them in policy research.

To illustrate: it is common for critics of policy to apply one particular value position to a policy and, if the policy does not measure up satisfactorily on that value, then to judge the policy unacceptable. For example, a policy of school resourcing may be judged unsatisfactory on equity grounds. The policy makers may indeed accept

equity as a value to which they are committed, and therefore as a constraint they accept on their actions. They will, however, almost always be operating under other constraints as well: equity for them will be one member of a set of constraints. Policy research which helps policy makers implement equity values will understand equity in relation to the whole constraint set, and assist policy makers to frame problems and find solutions which are practicable given the set, not just the equity value.

This requires, not easygoing pragmatism (though it is certainly both pragmatist and pragmatic) but hard intellectual work, including conceptualisation, analysis, and the gathering of whatever empirical data assists in understanding the constraint set and developing a solution to the policy problem. One reason why policies are so often ineffective, or even unimplemented, is that policy makers themselves do not have the time or resources to do this hard work. In doing this work policy researchers will discover much about the policy process itself, as well as becoming able to play a part in improving it and the quality of its outcomes. This kind of research requires collaboration between researchers and policy makers. Nothing is more likely to strengthen the links between researchers and policy makers than that policy makers come to see themselves as stakeholders in the educational policy research agenda, rather than merely commissioners of particular projects of relevance to their needs from time to time. It is the difference between collaboration and partnership on the one hand and expediency on the other.

A Possible Research and Development Agenda

The obvious questions : So what? What's to be done?, now spring to the

fore of the discussion. Only suggestions need be made here – the exploratory nature of the analysis, the unavoidable tentative nature of the conclusions reached, the lack of extensive consultation with researchers and policy makers makes it inappropriate to be normative at this stage. These possible suggestions are offered below to stimulate further discussion on the issues identified, rather than to instruct the communities of researchers and policy makers on how to proceed henceforth. They are proposed to clarify the identification of problems and provide possible alternative solutions; that is, in the end, to produce a more appropriate list of 'what's to be done' in Australian education policy research. In order to facilitate the task of supporting or criticising them, the suggestions are collated under separate headings, reflecting the structure of the paper. Of course, the categories are not mutually exclusive and, in fact, the degree of mutual impact across the activities identified is considerable.

Establishment of a specific network for research on educational policy

processes.

The need to establish a strong academic foundation to the activities of the SIG has been emphasized often enough in the paper. As background and context for this kind of endeavour, it would be useful for members of the SIG to map their own research, on several dimensions, highlighting outcomes in terms of the policy process, and then to extend the mapping to other research being conducted in Australia. The dimensions could include topics, methodology, funding sources, publication outlets and evidence of impact on practice. Such mapping could then be set alongside what is learned of the needs and interests of policy makers and perhaps also a socio-historical account of recent policy trends and issues in Australia. Simon Marginson's (1993) recent work represents an excellent start in this area. To facilitate the task it could be useful to establish:

- A national register of policy analysts and researchers;
- An (electronic) newsletter to keep interested researchers abreast with developments;
- Coordinated activities such those of exposure, teamwork and integration;
- A list server to disseminate research publications in educational policy;
- A national (electronic) clearinghouse on policy case studies reflecting comparable formats;
- A National Key Network Centre on Educational Policy Research

Development of quality education and training programs in educational policy researcher and analysis.

This part of the agenda could include:

- The evaluation of current curriculum in specialized degrees and programs in educational policy, including their articulation in the overall degree structure of the offering institution;
- The establishment of a practicum in policy research and analysis, to be negotiated with educational authorities at regional, state and national level;
- The establishment of suitable institutional arrangements, such as through a national Network PhD/EdD Program, to pool supervision resources as well as to enrich the experience of prospective policy researchers and analysts through exposure to a range of research approaches and concrete policy instances; similar outcome could be sought at Master and Diploma level through the shared development of open learning offerings.

Development of industry cooperation and partnership in educational policy research and analysis

The need identified by the SIG for researchers to work more closely

with policy makers could be achieved through a range of activities. Next to the 'practicum' proposed above, other initiatives could be initiated aimed at achieving better understanding of the needs of

policy makers and the constraints under which they work. These would help researchers strengthen the policy relevance and the intellectual quality of their work; they would also be a step towards increasing the respect of policy makers for educational policy researchers and even seeing themselves as having a stake in educational policy research. Such activities could include:

- Planned regular exchanges of policy academics and practicing policy professionals between their respective work places
- Annual up-dating national workshops of researchers and policy makers on advancement in policy studies and their possible application to current policy problems.
- Annual conferences on curriculum and graduate employment, allowing a better alignment of scholarly curricula with employer needs in educational policy and research.

Fostering literacy and awareness in policy processes

This paper has confirmed the need to initiate activities to increase understanding in educational policy outside the specialized groups of educational policy researchers, to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of educational researchers and practitioners in policy developments. Besides the cooperative modes identified before (exposure, teamwork and integration) other activities could include the inclusion of core policy process related concepts in the curriculum of non policy-specialized programs, such as:

- Training in a range of educational research areas;
- Training of educational administrators;
- Pre-service and in-service teacher education.

Footnotes

1In this context, it is interesting to browse through the special issue of the International Journal of Educational Research devoted to 'Educational Research in Australia, 1988' (Dunkin, 1988). The issue was found to be significant enough to be accepted as Endorsed Bicentennial Activity by the Australian Bicentennial Authority. It covers topics highly relevant to educational policy but treated here through disciplinary lenses (including terminology) from sociology, politics, psychology and linguistics, that is lenses from disciplines other than what the literature identifies commonly as 'policy studies' (e.g. Nigel, 1983).

2For an analysis of the epistemology of 'disciplines' consonant with the general theoretical orientation of this paper, see Walker & Evers (1982).

3The search was conducted by a team of researchers from the Educational Policy Program of the University of Wollongong, led by Carla Fasano as part of a larger project on policy research. Acknowledgment is due to the other team members (John Hedberg, Barry Harper, Ian Brown, Christine Brown, David Green and John Patterson) for their agreement to use a small component of the results in this paper before publication.

4Three data bases were searched: ERIC, SOCIOFILE and PYCHLIT. There were no limits on dates of publication. The search string was: (policy OR implementation) AND (theory OR model OR paradigm OR process OR analysis)

5Note that Figure 1 shows only post-1986 publications, to take into account the different 'age' of the journals.

6Similar results, pointing to scarcity of reporting on theoretical and methodological issues has been found by Gabriele Lakomski in her study of the Journal of Educational Administration (Lakomski, 1989)

7A well-known mathematical law in Bibliometrics (Bradford Law) has verified that, for established research communities, a small number of journals only publish large numbers of articles primarily devoted to research topics specific to the communities, while a much larger number of journals may devote only a marginal place to these topics in their volume of publications (Vickery and Vickery, 1987)

8A possible exception here is the community of educational policy researchers in the US, who could be concentrating their publications in two journals, Educational Researcher and Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, both published by the American Educational Research Association, of which these researchers are members.

9Vol. 7, no. 4, 1992 issue is a Special Issue on Australian Policy Research. Authors listed include L.B.Angus, J.Blackmore, S.Crumps and M.Henry.

10Further supporting evidence comes from the publication of the second issue of the Review of Australian Research in Education (Walker, 1993) entirely devoted to educational policy research and its relation to policy making. Authors listed include J.Walker, S.Marginson, C.Fasano, H.Hocking, R.Harrold and S.Crump. Yet in planning and producing this issue the editor decided that there was not a sufficiently clearly identifiable body of work, to be called 'educational policy research in Australia', for the articles to actually conduct review of research, although some do this in a minor way, while concentrating on research topics, issues and processes.

11Mechanisms to allocate research funds identified in the literature are tender on specific tasks (procurement), through competition on a list of priority topics (solicitation) and through pools of funds available for investigator-initiated research (assistance) (Weiss, 1978)

12The same could be said for the UK, as evidenced in the decline of 'sociology of education' and the rise of 'policy sociology'.

13This paper eschews the debate on similarity and differences between policy research and analysis (Majchrzak, 1984; Hogwood & Gunn, 1984), and uses the two terms interchangeably.

14Established at the turn of the 80s, this journal is the official journal of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, an association of policy researchers, practitioners and educators, counting a growing nucleus of educational policy researchers among its members.

15A very brief survey of such recent understanding would include the breakdown of former theoretical separations between policy formation and administration, between policy formulation and implementation, between both the above and evaluation, between policy recipients and policy deliverers. The recognition that policy deliverers, such as educational administrators, principals and teachers, are as influential as policy formulators at fashioning the success or failure of educational policy. That the type of financial instruments used to implement policy leaves a major mark on policy output and outcomes. That the behaviour of policy recipients can be a major determinant of policy formulation and evaluation. That organizations other than relevant public agencies can play major roles in determining policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. That the relationship among all actors and factors are far from being linear, sequential and easily predictable. That the results above are valid across public policy contents and sectors (e.g Palumbo & Calista, 1990; Odden, 1991)

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