

The State as Process:
Governmentality and Policy Text Production in Education

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Abstract:

This paper draws on the presenter's current doctoral work into the analysis of policy text production in recent federal initiatives in teacher education. It commences from a position, under debate in contemporary policy sociology at present, that a conceptualisation of the state is central to understanding the

policy process. Given this centrality, the paper moves on to explore how recent theorising in social theory on the notion of "governmentality" may be useful in understanding policy making in the state. A Foucaultian concept, governmentality refers to the relationship between governmental programs, political rationalities and governmental technologies. The task of this paper, then, is to outline this Foucaultian notion of governmentality, engage it in terms of the critical state theoretical perspective of the research being undertaken and evaluate its usefulness for understanding policy making in the state.

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Introduction

The advent of market ideology and practices within education in recent years has had significant implications for the nature and role of the state in western capitalist societies like Australia. The resurgence of classical economics, the success of New Right politics and the ideology of "self-interest" have, in the world of realpolitik, weakened the role of the state in the market sphere and have reconstituted the state's administrative practices along managerialist lines (Lingard, 1993 p.25). In the realm of social theory, too, the concept of the state is one that is increasingly coming under attack. Much poststructuralist and postmodernist theorising, for instance, with their emphases on difference, pluralities, contingency, anti-essentialism and understandings of power as capillary and productive, argue that the state is too aggregative a notion to be of use either theoretically or politically (e.g. Allen, 1990; Aronowitz, 1992). It is somewhat ironic perhaps, as Lingard (1993) points out, that:

there is a way in which it is the "successful reification of power which modernism has accomplished in the state" which has 'allowed' the plural and diverse "postmodernisms freedom from power" (Clegg, 1989 p.274). (Lingard, 1993 p.26)

Nevertheless, it is the case that if the political - in a normative sense - and theoretical importance of the state is not to wither, then some renovation of state theory is necessary. Now more than ever given the increasing policy activity in education on the one hand, and threats to equity and social justice agendas in education on the other, is this the case.

In terms of attempting to understand the policy process in

education, a number of writers have called for renewed attention to be paid to a theory of the state and to a theory of the policy cycle which takes account of such a theory. Apple (1994), Dale (1992), Lingard (1993), Ozga (1990) and Raab (1994) have all called for some renovation of state theory in order to better understand the policy process in education. For example, Dale (1992), argues that the 'concentration on the state...has often been at the expense of considering other potentially crucial contributions to the formulation and execution of education policy' (p.388). Lingard (1993), meanwhile, argues that 'a more sophisticated theory of the state needs to be utilised within a policy cycle approach' (p.43). Raab (1994) advocates a "policy network" approach to policy analysis and notes the theoretical opportunity that may come from a theory of the state which theorises 'the "complexity and difference" which arbitrates the fortunes of policy' (p.12-13). It is in this context, then, that the theory of governmentality, initially developed by Foucault, may be of some use in steering discussion of the state away from unitary and monolithic understandings on the one hand, and away from pluralistic and relativistic understandings associated with poststructuralism on the other, to a notion of the state as a social and historical process of modernity discursively constituted by the actions of state agents such as significant and strategically placed professionals and intellectuals (Watts, 1993/1994 p.123). As will be seen in the following discussion, such a view may very well provide a way out of the present binary facing policy sociology in education.

The State Control/Policy Cycle Binary

In terms of the state of policy sociology in education at present, two major positions are discernible. On the one hand there is Roger Dale's (1989) seminal work *The State and Education Policy* which represents a Neo-Marxist theoretical understanding of the state and education policy. On the other hand, there is the work of Stephen Ball (1990, 1993) and his associates, Richard Bowe and Anne Gold (1992) whose work - especially that of Ball's - is increasingly informed by the insights of poststructuralist theorising.

In his (1989) work, Dale applied neo-Marxist theorising to the relationship between the state and education in capitalist societies in order to better understand the nature of educational stability and change and explain the basic problems facing education systems in capitalist countries (p.25). In particular, Dale draws on Offe's theory of the state in which Offe's distinction between conjunctural and structural policy conditions

is used to explain the formulation of the policies of the then Thatcher government. More specifically, following Offe, Dale points out that in times of economic downturn, such as in Thatcher's England, governments seek to manage policy demands through a structural policy rationale rather than merely through increased expenditure and policy coverage. Thatcher's policies, Dale shows, reveal an emphasis on the ideology of self-sufficiency in order to reduce the expectations on governments - a structural policy rationale.

Dale's (1989) position has been critiqued by a number of writers in the field of policy sociology and even to an extent by Dale himself in a later work (1992). Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992 p.7) argue that Dale portrays policy 'generation' as remote and detached from 'implementation'. Policy is seen as linear and as something which 'gets done' to people by a chain of implementors whose roles are clearly defined in legislation. In other words, Dale's position is seen as functionalist. Lingard (1993) also points out weaknesses in Dale's position - mainly in terms of its aggregated notion of the state and in its gender and race blindness - arguing that they stem from broader weaknesses in the Offean perspective he utilises (Lingard, 1993 p.42). Dale himself (1992) also acknowledges that his (1989) explanation:

tended dangerously towards monocausality,,, often at the expense of considering other potentially crucial contributions to the formulation and execution of education policy. (Dale, 1992 p.388).

Nevertheless, Dale's position in the debate is clear as seen in his assertion that 'A focus on the [s]tate is not only necessary, but the most important component of any adequate understanding of education policy' (1992 p.388). While such a view is supported in terms of this paper, it is still the case that a more sophisticated understanding of the state is needed.

The position of Ball (1990, 1993) and Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) is even more problematic in terms of this paper.

Essentially, their argument, as put forward in their (1992) work *Reforming Education and Changing Schools*, purports that policy is best thought of as texts constituted by discourses. Policy is thus seen as a representation which is encoded and decoded in complex ways. Policy texts may be 'readerly' or 'writerly' according to the degree of interpretation allowed to the reader, but always and inevitably texts are interpreted and thus contested, adopted, adapted in different contexts of work. According to this understanding, policy is constantly being made

and remade at different educational sites. The authors acknowledge this when they claim that,

In effect, the ERA is being constantly rewritten as different kinds of official texts and utterances are produced by key actors or agencies of government. (1992, p.12)

While this is an exciting theoretical approach, it is not without its shortfalls.

The pluralism and voluntarism of this position, for instance, point to a Foucauldian conception of power as a productive capacity. All those involved in the policy process are seen to exercise power at the particular points through which it passes. This position, however, may not be the most apposite nor the most complete way of understanding policy - as Evans, Davies and Penny (1994) point out:

A Foucauldian project provides us with very little direction for interrogating how a policy text is constructed, and even less on how it is relayed. Even acknowledging the hybridisation of a text (it can have

multiple 'producers' and 'readers') does not account for the ways that the meanings of a particular signifier, or text, in a particular situation is ordered, at least in part by material interests, agencies and agents of government, and power relations. (1994, p.59)

Perhaps realising something of this, Bowe, Ball and Gold also introduce into their conceptual schema the notion of policy as discourse.

While policy as text celebrates human agency and potentiality, policy as discourse is about constraint and limit. As Bowe, Ball and Gold intimate:

policy as discourse...constituted of possibilities and impossibilities, tied to knowledge on the one hand...and practice on the other. (1992, p.13)

Discourses are about what can be said and thought, about who can speak, where and with what authority. Policy, then, may be seen as process 'which always is constructed and set within moving discursive frames which articulate and constrain the possibilities and probabilities of circumstances and enactment of policy' (Evans et al. 1994, p.60).

Of Bowe, Ball and Gold's position, Evans et al (1994) suggest that:

The concept of policy as discourse is intended to act as check on the postmodernism inherent in the concepts of policy as text and

'relational power'. (1994, p.59)

Evans et al's main concern, however, is that, while useful, the concepts of policy as text and policy as discourse do not and can not alone 'provide a sufficient framework for understanding the complexities of policy, especially the way the government ('state') and 'the subject' are implicated in the construction of the policy process' (1994, p.57). Watts (1993/1994), though more sympathetic to the use of discourse analysis, nevertheless also shares a similar concern:

For all of the value which comes from an insistence on the discursive character of social action, by itself an emphasis on discourse will not give us the kind of capacity to think the state in its context. (p.121)

Even more bluntly, Watts asserts that::

Too much discourse analysis also displays little sense of change or embeddedness on history and relatively little evidence of the real work of actors in revising and amending and using discourses, and little sense of the contest between discourses. (1993/1994 p.123)

Lingard (1993) is also concerned that the strong conception of the state evident in Ball's 1990 policy sociology has been washed away in the 1992 study by a more overt and complete poststructuralist solution. This, he argues, is to the detriment of the research endeavour:

The [Bowe, Ball and Gold] account of educational policy making and policy practice...amplifies the power of schools and teachers to modify such policies and over time has neglected state structures. The weaknesses of [this] approach result from its uncritical acceptance of the verities of poststructuralist theorising. (1993, p.38)

For Lingard, there are extra-discursive and structural aspects contributing to the effects of policy; his own research shows that a reconfigured state remains important both in theoretical and political terms. For the purposes of this paper, the concept of governmentality may assist in understanding this change.

In attempting to move away analytically from both a managerialist and state control model, Bowe, Ball and Gold have

theorised policy as constantly being made and remade at different sites of educational practice as it revolves around three different contexts of influence, text production and practice, with an interactive and continuous relationship between contexts and ongoing recontextualisations. This is indeed a useful framework but its weakness, as indicated above, lies in its failure to more fully conceptualise the role and impact of the state on the policy process. As Lingard argues:

A stronger conception of the state needs to be inserted into the cycle for it has an impact on each of these contexts; indeed it is present in some ways in each. (1993, p.40)

State structure, explains Lingard, in drawing on the work of Offe, mediates the contexts of influence whether they are working on the central or local site of the state' (1993, p.40). This can

be seen in the non-arbitrary character of central policy and local practice relationships. Although Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992, p.9) argue, correctly, that the impact of central state policy in schools remains an empirical question, the non-arbitrary nature of this relationship suggests that empirical policy research should allow the theorising of possible central/local relations. What the policy cycle approach appears to forget is that schools are local sites of the state even within a devolution or local management framework.

Governmentality, the State and Policy Production

Foucault's concept of governmentality may very well provide a way forward out of this seeming double bind. By way of background, it is worthwhile noting something of the historical emergence of this form of rule.

In his (1991) article of the same title, Foucault explains that government, unlike historically earlier forms of state rule, was internal to the state or society of which it was part. Its ascendancy in the 17th and 18th centuries involved derestricting it from the structure and objectives of sovereignty and linking it to the pivotal notion of "the population". Foucault (1991 p.100) explains that first, the family was abandoned as the central model of government. The population was seen to have its own internal configurations and regularities and these were seen to be irreducible to a simple template of the family. Indeed, the family was now to be relocated under the umbrella of the population where it was to become an instrument of government

rather than a model for it. Second, the population became the new *raison d'être* of government. Government had in a sense been its own purpose operating almost exclusively in the interests of the sovereign. It was now to be directed at, and work in the interests of, the sovereign. This would occur both directly and indirectly, not simply in improving its conditions, but also in managing its habits, aspirations and interests. Government would therefore become what Gordon (1991 p.2) refers to as 'the conduct of conduct'. Finally, the population then became the central point of intervention into the new field of political economy. This marks the transition in the 18th century from 'a regime dominated by the structures of sovereignty to one ruled by the techniques of government' (Foucault, 1991:101). The new "science of government", employing the problem of the population, shifted the old notion of economy (within that metaphor of the family) to the domain of what is now referred to as "the economic".

The issue of sovereignty did not become a non-issue in this development. Foucault (1991, p101-102) suggests that the rise of governmentality meant that questions concerning sovereignty were raised with renewed vigour. Similarly, the emphasis on discipline, whose origins can be traced back to the 17th and 18th centuries, was augmented rather than diminished when employed in the management of populations. Thus, the important point is made that discipline did not replace sovereignty, only to be replaced itself by government. Rather, as Foucault explains, 'one has a triangle, sovereignty- discipline-government, which has as its primary target the population...' (1991 p.102). Foucault summarises his account of "governmentality" as follows:

By this word I mean three things:

1. The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.
2. The tendency which, over a long period and throughout the west, has steadily led towards the pre-eminence over all other forms (sovereignty, discipline) of this type of power which may be termed government, resulting, on the one hand, in the formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses, and on the other, in the development of a whole complex of savoirs.
3. The process, or rather the result of the process, through which the state of justice of the middle ages, transformed into

the administrative state during the 15th and 16th centuries, gradually became "governmentalised".
(Foucault, 1991 p.102-103)

Thus, through the above reasoning, Foucault is able to downplay the importance of the state which he argues survived because it became governmentalised. Indeed, in Foucault's terms, the state is seen as a function of government rather than the other way around as in state control theory.

In his recent article, "Government and Modernity", Watts (1993\1994) points out that 'governmentality is of the essence in the new disembedded configurations of modernity' (p.139). In contrast to space and place in pre-modern societies, modernity, explains Watts, drawing on the work of Giddens, involves the 'lifting out of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space' (p.130). Through the creation of symbolic tokens and the establishment of expert systems of knowledge, which are then fed back into the social relations and institutions of modernity in what Giddens calls a double hermeneutic, the disembedding of the social relations of modernity takes place. This process of constitutive abstraction (Watts, 1993\1994 p.131) according to Watts is carried out by the intellectually trained in our society. Their work, as they necessarily produce abstraction and distantiation on the one hand, and attempt to reintegrate social relations through abstracted and rationalised forms of knowledge and administration on the other (Watts, 1993\1994 p.145) effects modernity and constitutes governmentality. The state, then, is seen as a 'special site of social discursive action' (Watts, 1993\1994 p.126) in this process - a central field of action in the governing of the population.

This conception of the state as a process of governmentality as theorised by Watts has the advantage of moving beyond the notion of the state as a unified monolith with its functionalist, "top-down" policy implications on the one hand, and of challenging the plurality and relativism of a purely poststructuralist account of policy as an assemblage of discourses on the other. In their place, the state can be seen as a social and historical process produced as part of the art of government by the intellectually trained in their contradictory and dialectical social activity of constitutive abstraction. This

point addresses the issue, voiced by Lingard (1993 p.43), of needing to take account of both the ad hocry of both the macro and micro without collapsing into a poststructuralist pluralism. Moreover, Watts' account is useful in explaining the concern in

critiques of social theory of what drives discourses and why certain discourses emerge as dominant: dominant discourses are discursive steps taken by significant and strategically placed intellectuals in response to shifts in the interplay of discourse and practice. In terms of power, this description accords with Franzway, Court and Connell's description of the state as 'a node within a network of power relations' (1989 p.37).

In terms of the practice of policy analysis, the above account of governmentality means that we need to:

develop a picture of both the context of state action and the role of social actors who are implicated in the constitution of states and their governmentalities....We need to pay attention to the processes whereby particular social actors constitute both the problems and the solutions to those problems that become governmentality. (Watts 1993/1994 p.125)

This echoes Franzway et al 's (1989) call for a "practice-based account of the state" in which "people matter" (p.47). It also means that analysis of policy discourses and their social effects needs to be "grounded" which will:

require producing historically specific accounts of the social practices that involve the activities of states in the production of jurisdictions and interventions, and their employment of intellectually trained personnel and their techniques of communication. (Watts 1993/1994 p.125)

Similar practice is advocated by Apple (1994 p.352) in his call for a "nuanced" understanding of each site in the policy process.

Finally, the character of governmentality means that the different questions about policy have to be asked. Most modern policy literature, explains Watts, 'begins with the question of how social problems get to be discovered as the prelude to policy development' . This question, he continues, ' assumes that states "discover" problems typically through "empirical" research' (p.141). In place of this approach, Watts poses a different set of questions: 'What are the processes whereby the problem "objects" that comprise the basis of policy interventions come to be constituted, and who takes part in these processes?' (p.141). These questions echo Beilharz's (1987) perceptive insight into policy:

Problems are not given but constructed, agendas are not self-evident but are produced as though they were; policy making is an instrumental exercise which necessarily fails to see itself as such. (1987 p.389)

It is in these ways that the concept of governmentality may cast a new theoretical light on the process of policy production and implementation.

Conclusion

This paper addressed the current binary in policy sociology between on the one hand the state control position associated with the work of Dale (1989, 1992) and on the other, the policy cycle position of Ball (1990, 1993) and his associates (1992). It was argued that a step forward in this standoff may be gained by engaging the concept of governmentality theorised by Foucault and discussed by Watts (1993/1994). A number of advantages of engaging governmentality were noted in the discussion of the above debate.

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