

## **A Conceptual Framework for Analysis of Education Policy and Practices**

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This paper provides the conceptual framework used in the subsequent three papers in the symposium which present different case studies of educational policy analysis.

Other papers in the symposium (not for refereeing):

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### **Introduction**

I want to encourage a wide range of people to become involved in research in education policy. I want to remove 'policy' from its pedestal, and make it accessible to the wider community, both as a subject of study and a possible research area. In doing this I am arguing - implicitly and explicitly - that policy is to be found everywhere in education, and not just at the level of central government, and that there is virtue in engaging with policy in this way, because it contributes to a democratic project in education... (Ozga, 2000, p. 2)

The aim of this paper, and this symposium, is to present an approach to policy and policy analysis which is consistent with Jenny Ozga's (2000) sentiment above. In particular, I want to broaden the definition of education policy to include practices within schools and classrooms. Teachers are policy makers, in my view, as they actively engage in both the construction and interpretation of policy in their schools and classrooms. I argue that the ability of teacher-researchers (1) to actively engage with policy will be enhanced with the aid of some specialised 'tools' for policy analysis. Thus, this paper hopes to contribute, in just a small way, to increasing the selection of 'tools' for our 'toolboxes'. The early parts of this paper focus on theoretical perspectives because I take the position that theories guide our daily practices, again consistent with Ozga's (2000, p. 42) argument for "the need to *understand* education policy in a theoretically informed way". However, the paper then moves on to derive from these theories some practical pointers in the quest to better understand, and therefore engage with, education policy processes. The subsequent papers in this symposium later present specific examples of the different ways our 'toolboxes' might be used by teacher-researchers to conduct policy analysis.

In educational policy research, there has been a growing resistance to the separation of 'formulation' and 'implementation' phases of policy. The orientation has shifted from an emphasis on the policy intentions of central authorities at the macro level to incorporating an analysis of policy practices, effects and consequences at the micro level. For example, Cibulka (1994, p. 111) has acknowledged that "we now recognise that implementors have an explicit policy role, not merely a technical one". Similarly, Malen (1994) has pointed to 'street level' service providers 'remaking' policy as it is implemented, and Fitz and Halpin (1994) have argued for a balanced approach between the centre's power to disseminate policy and the capacity of practitioners to interpret policies rather than simply execute them.

The following small selection of definitions of policy by educationalists reflects the changing emphasis. In the 1970s, Kogan referred to policies as "statements of prescriptive intent" and "the authoritative allocation of values" (1975, p. 55). In the 1980s, Ham and Hill maintained that policy analysis aims to "interpret the causes and consequences of government action, in particular the processes of policy formulation" (1984, p. 11). Codd defined policy as "any course of action (or inaction) relating to the selection of goals, the definition of values or the allocation of resources" (1988a, p. 235). By the 1990s, Ball was being more explicit about examining what individuals and groups actually *do* in response to policy. Accordingly, policy is "both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended" (Ball, 1994a, p. 10).

During the 1990s, a central issue in the education policy literature was the extent to which a 'state control' or a 'policy cycle' conception of the policy process was the most useful (Lingard, 1993; Troyna, 1994; Ranson, 1995; Taylor, 1997). This 'state control' versus 'policy cycle' debate can be located within the broader theoretical perspectives of modernism and postmodernism, respectively, and thus a small diversion to outline these wider concepts follows. Then, explications of 'state-centred' (macro-oriented) and Stephen Ball's 'policy cycle' (micro-oriented) perspectives on policy analysis are presented. Ball's evolving approach to policy analysis is critiqued as it forms the backbone of the approach to policy analysis offered in this paper, albeit with modifications. An eclectic approach which draws from both 'state-centred' and 'policy cycle' perspectives is synthesised, and the paper concludes with some practical pointers in the form of questions which might be used to interrogate a particular policy process, according to this conceptual framework.

### **On the Cusp of Modernist and Postmodernist Perspectives**

In attempting to navigate the cusp of modernism and postmodernism, lack of conformity in nomenclature in the literature is evident. For example, the terms '*postmodernism*' and

'postmodernity' are sometimes distinguished on the basis that the former focuses on cultural dimensions and the latter focuses on social dimensions (Hargreaves, 1994), but at other times these terms are used interchangeably. Also, *postmodernism* is sometimes distinguished from *poststructuralism*, but at other times these terms are used interchangeably. Lather (1991), for example, has acknowledged that "I sometimes use *postmodern* to mean the larger cultural shifts of a post-industrial, post-colonial era and *poststructural* to mean the working out of those shifts within the arenas of academic theory. I also, however, use the terms interchangeably" (Lather, 1991, p. 4). In this paper, distinctions between postmodernism and postmodernity, and between postmodernism and poststructuralism will not be explicitly made, but the terms used by various authors will be maintained as their work is discussed. In moving on to characterise modernism and postmodernism, as with Lather, I remain aware that "I face the inescapability of reductionism" (Lather, 1991, p. xix).

Modernism has been characterised by instrumental rationality and grand structuralist theories which provide certainty, predictability and enlightened progress (Hartley, 1994). On the other hand, postmodernism is defined by the fact that it is against modernism (Green, 1994). A key proponent, Lyotard, defined postmodernism as an "incredulity toward metanarrative" (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). It has been further characterised by uncertainty, heterogeneity and pluralism (Green, 1994) as well as flexibility and difference (Harvey, 1991). A postmodernist perspective is deconstructive (Capper, Hanson & Ropers Huilman, 1994).

Hargreaves (1994) offered a comprehensive comparison of modernism and postmodernism on economic, political, organisational and personal grounds. Economically, modernity features mass production, monopoly capitalism or state socialism to increase productivity and profitability. By contrast, postmodernism features the production of information and services, with the driving economic principle being flexibility for rapid responsiveness to local and changing markets. Politically and organisationally, modernism features decision making controlled from the centre, such as evident in large hierarchically organised bureaucracies which differentiate specialised functions. By contrast postmodernism is characterised by decentralised decision making with less distinct hierarchies and reduced specialisation. Finally, on the personal level, with modernism the price of rationality is disenchantment and alienation, whereas with postmodernism the enhanced personal empowerment is moderated by lack of stability.

It should be emphasised that there is danger in the use of labels such as 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' to identify different theoretical approaches (especially postmodernist perspectives) as they can suggest a greater degree of theoretical consistency and consensus than actually exists. For example, critical theory has been described as clearly modernist and also as a compromise between modernist positivism and postmodernist relativism (Codd, 1988b), and thus critical theory might be located near the cusp of the different perspectives. Habermas, a principal proponent of critical theory, moved beyond a Marxist focus on economic production to include cultural and political dimensions. He saw rational discourse embedded in interactive communication, where truth and validity are a product of that communication, so that truth is not absolute (Hall, Held & McGrew, 1992). This conception is moving toward the relativism of postmodernism, although majority opinion would probably still locate Habermas within a modernist framework (Hall, Held & McGrew, 1992). Capper et al. (1994) described the difference between critical theory and postmodernism:

Critical theorists call into question the power relationships that exist in society and view them within social, historical, political and economic contexts.

Poststructuralists go further to call into question the very nature of these contexts in which we view our society. (Capper et al., 1994, p. 346)

For postmodernists, power is not unitary but dispersed through institutions and processes (Watts, 1993/94). Foucault, who is frequently cited as a quintessential postmodernist (although he resisted such classification), offered a conception of power which is decentralised and plural. Foucault contended that power circulates everywhere and can be productive rather than necessarily repressive (Capper et al., 1994).

For some commentators, the differences between a modernist and postmodernist stance are irreconcilable. Some sections of the literature point to a battlefield with strongly held and defended camps. Postmodernism's principal strengths are usually seen as its counterbalance to the extreme determinism of modernism and its ability to provide an analytic tool at a micro level. However, it in turn is criticised for its extreme relativism and conservatism which reinforces existing power and replaces one oppressive grand narrative for another (Whitty, 1992; Green, 1994).

While clusters of contrasting features have been used to distinguish the extreme types of modernism and postmodernism, the approach taken here is to reject the notion of a distinct dichotomy and to focus on the cusp or intersection of these different approaches. Other writers have also expressed a desire to maintain a foot in both camps. Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) have argued that both modernist and postmodernist discourses need to be examined for the ways in which each counteracts the worst features of the other, and that educators can draw from the strengths of each. In a similar vein, Apple (1995) has suggested that Foucauldian and neo-Marxist analyses be placed side by side, offering sometimes complementary and sometimes contradictory perspectives, and Ozga (2000, p. 50) asserts that "a simple polarity of pluralism and Marxism is no longer sufficient to capture the kinds of choices of theoretical resource available to researchers". The assumption is that different approaches are capable of complementing each other and together offering greater insights. The conceptual approach offered in this paper might be described as 'critical postmodernism' as it draws understandings from both modernist (state-centred) and postmodernist (policy cycle) perspectives, as outlined in the subsequent sections.

### **'State-Centred' Approaches to Policy Analysis**

There has been an ongoing evolution of the conceptualisation of the state and its role in (education) policy making. In the early pluralist approach, the state was seen as a neutral mediator of competing interests. However, by the late 1970s theories of the dominating, even hegemonic, position of the state in education policy making became popular, as the work of European critical theorists was eventually translated and reported widely in English. By the 1980s, in education, increasing centralisation of power, including greater ministerial control, was being widely observed. Ball (1990b) has postulated that one reason for the late recognition of the powerful role of the state in education policy making was its earlier crude and narrow conceptualisation.

By the 1990s, the previously taken-for-granted homogeneity of the state was being challenged and the contradictory tensions inherent within the state were being highlighted. At this time, the New Right critique of the state was in the ascent, with its claim that state intervention to promote egalitarian social goals (a feature of the welfare state) had been responsible for the violation of individual rights which are necessary for economic prosperity (Peters & Marshall, 1996). The New Right remedy was to privilege the market above all other institutions and to adopt the rhetoric of a minimal state.

By the 1990s, too, globalisation was placing the whole notion of the state under pressure (Taylor et al., 1997). Within the globalisation scenario, national economic policies are seen as increasingly irrelevant, as they are unable to control global markets. Pannu (1996) has argued that globalisation along with the market ideology have challenged the hegemony of the state and have themselves risen to new hegemonic status. However, he does not believe that these forces have demanded the dismantling of the state, but rather what has occurred is a remantling of the state for the protection of global markets. Pannu sees the role of the state as becoming the management of social tensions to maintain the legitimacy of this new world order. He has associated the remantling of the state with its loss of political power and raised questions about the legitimacy, accountability and autonomy of the remantled state. Hindness (1994) was also concerned about the implications of globalisation for the state, and argued that the government's economic management, which was highly visible to the electorate under Keynesian welfare state policies, has turned into piecemeal interventions as governments struggle to make an impact in the global economy.

The point of the preceding paragraphs was to indicate that in the space of the closing three decades of the twentieth century, the perceived role of the state in policy making has changed markedly. These different conceptualisations of the nature of the state are central to the education policy debate referred to in the introduction. Dale has been a key advocate of a state-centred position on education policy making which emphasises the macro constraints operating on practitioners at the micro level. However, his book, *The State and Education Policy* (1989) emphasised that the state is not a monolith, nor the same as government (the remainder of the state consists of state apparatuses such as the police, military, judiciary, legal system and education). Dale identified a change towards increasing control by the state involving a symbiosis between the state and the market which features in the New Right ideology. He argued that whereas the post-war welfare state settlement involved protecting the victims of the market, the new relationship between the two reverses the priorities, so that the state defends the market from social dislocations.

This state-centred approach adopted by Dale has been both lauded and criticised in the education policy literature. Apple (1989) was most complimentary of Dale's movement beyond a limited conception of the state in Marxist terms, with its economism and reductionism, to add stronger political and ideological dimensions. In particular he cited Dale's illumination of the state's ideological battle for hegemonic control, and the inherent contradictions and conflicts within the state as a marked contribution to a more subtle definition of the state. Ozga (1990) has supported Dale's approach and similarly emphasised that state-centred models are quite capable of accommodating complexity and difference, and that it is only in a caricatured form that the state-centred approach is made to appear overly deterministic. She maintained that a statist framework could be used for a comprehensive investigation into "the source, scope and pattern of any education policy, the operation of the state apparatus, its internal contradictions and conflicts, the historical antecedents of policy structure, content and culture" (Ozga, 1990, p. 361).

By contrast with the support from such critical theorists (or neo-Marxists) for Dale's approach cited in the paragraph above, Bowe, Ball and Gold in *Reforming Education, Changing Schools* (1992) criticised Dale's 'state control' approach for its detachment of policy generation from implementation. However, both Lingard (1993) and Raab (1994) questioned this critique, as they did not see that Dale's account separated these different policy phases. It is interesting that those in favour of Dale's approach refer to it as a state-centred perspective and those opposed call it a state control approach, suggesting the different emphases of *domination* by the state and *determination* by the state, respectively (Gale, 1994).



In a 1992 review essay, Dale (1992) reasserted his belief in the primacy of a state-centred approach. He maintained that "a focus on the state is not only necessary, but the most important component of any adequate understanding of education policy" (p. 388). However, he also recognised a limitation in his 1989 work that concentration on the state, notwithstanding attention to its inherent complexities, had been at the expense of considering important contributions to education policy making from outside the state.

Smyth (1994) agreed with Dale about the merit of using a state-centred approach to educational analysis because it focuses attention on the locus of power. However, Smyth recognised the drawbacks if the state is conceptualised as being too simplified (a single entity); too conspiratorial (omniscient controller); and too abstract (ignoring historical contexts). Smyth then approvingly quotes Dale's view of the inherent differences within the state, overcoming some of the potential pitfalls in a state-centred approach.

Like Dale, Cerny (1990) described a movement away from the 'welfare state' to what he called the 'competition state'. He maintained that the increased openness and interpenetration of the world economy forced changes from macro to micro interventions; from strategic industries to competitive advantage in the global marketplace; and from promoting national welfare to promoting enterprise, innovation and profitability in both private and public sectors. He argued that the state had been 'sucked in' to both civil society and to the competitiveness of the open world economy, and as a result it was having to act more like a market player. He forecast that, paradoxically, the total amount of state intervention would increase because the state would be supporting an ever-widening range of social and economic activities.

Yeatman (1993) also used the notion of the 'competitive' state, with its close relationship to the market, to describe the changes associated with the ascendancy of the New Right. According to Yeatman, reconfiguration of the state along corporate managerial lines has led to new policy structures and cultures. Yeatman (1993) as well as Lingard and Blackmore (1997) and Ball (2000) also referred to the emerging 'performative' state, drawing on Lyotard's notion of performativity, which involves a value shift towards market liberalism.

Lingard (1993; 1996) argued strongly that a reconfigured postmodern state is no less important (both politically and theoretically), but it operates in a different way. Therefore, a more complex, subtle, and nuanced theory of the state is required as a conceptual tool. He maintained that the new state mediates the relationship between the centre and local sites, and also mediates the local and the global. Furthermore, political strategy needs to take all of these different sites into account because localised efforts are not enough in the face of globalisation of the economy. Other analysts have also identified a reconfiguration of the state rather than a 'rolling back' of the state (as often claimed by governments) associated with the prevailing market ideology (Burchell, 1994; Bates, 1996; Bell, 1996; Ozga, 2000).

Thus, conceptualisation of the state has moved beyond unitary accounts to include greater complexity, heterogeneity, contradiction and contestation. For example, Taylor (1997) emphasised that the state is "a set of dynamic, historically located and complex processes rather than simply a set of institutions" (p. 29). Overall, the analysts cited in this section believe that the state retains an important role in education policy processes. As Crowson and Boyd (1995) emphasised "the state is more than just another actor" (p. 205) because it is able to employ legitimate coercion; shape other institutional features; define and enforce conditions of ownership and control; and fuse the collective will, and therefore a central position should be allocated to the state in policy analysis.

## Ball's 'Policy Cycle' Approach to Policy Analysis

The policy cycle approach, which adopts more of a postmodern orientation, centres on the work of Stephen Ball and colleagues who highlight the complex and contested nature of education policy as a process rather than an end product. Ball traces "policy formulation, struggle and response from within the state itself through to the various recipients of policy" (Ball, 1993b, p. 16). His emphasis has been on micro-political processes and the agency of individual practitioners in constructing policy at the local level. However, it is important to note at the outset that Ball's theoretical framework has not been static, but dynamic and unfolding, as briefly overviewed below.

In his book, *Politics and Policy Making in Education*, Ball (1990b) claimed to offer a resolution of the theoretical gap between a neo-Marxist, statist perspective with its "tidy generalities" and a pluralist perspective with its "messy realities of influence, pressure, dogma, expediency, conflict, compromise intransigence, resistance, error, opposition and pragmatism" (p. 9). His theoretical approaches have drawn heavily on the work of Michel Foucault. In *Foucault and Education*, Ball (1990a), identified key Foucauldian concepts which he saw as applicable to education. Discourse was central:

Discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations. Discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' ... In so far as discourses are constituted by exclusions as well as inclusions, by what cannot as well as what can be said, they stand in antagonistic relationship to other discourses. (Ball, 1990a, p. 2).

In the 1992 book, *Reforming Education and Changing Schools* (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992), models of education policy which separate the generation and implementation phases were rejected because they ignore the struggles over policy and reinforce a managerialist rationality. The authors maintained that there has not been a total exclusion of practitioners from either policy generation or policy implementation, and they used Barthes' notion of 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts to distinguish the extent to which practitioners are actively involved. 'Readerly' texts limit practitioner involvement, whereas 'writerly' texts invite the practitioner to co-author the text, thereby encouraging 'ownership'. In this 1992 book there was an emphasis on policy as discourse, or knowledge and practices which are contested. The authors maintained that the focus should be on both the formation of policy discourses and the active interpretation which occurs to link policy text to practice. This involves identifying "resistance, accommodations, subterfuge and conformity within and between arenas of practice and the plotting of clashes and mismatches between contending discourses at work in these arenas" (Bowe et al., 1992, p. 13). They proposed a continuous policy cycle to allow for the recontextualisation of policy throughout the policy process and distinguished three primary policy contexts: the context of influence (where interest groups struggle over construction of policy discourses); the context of policy text production (where texts represent policy, although they may contain inconsistencies and contradictions); and the context of practice (where policy is subject to interpretation and recreation). Each of these three contexts has multiple arenas of action (both public and private) and each involves struggles. Figure 1 below represents movement away from a linear model of policy by Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992)

## Figure 1

### Contexts of Policy Making

Source: Bowe et al., 1992, p. 20

In a subsequent article Ball (1993b) further developed the toolbox of concepts for analysing policy by drawing a more explicit distinction between 'policy as text' and 'policy as discourse'. The conceptualisation of 'policy as text' is based on literary theory which sees policies as representations which are coded and decoded in complex ways. Any particular text will have a plurality of readings by a plurality of readers. However, Ball emphasised that this is not to deny that policy authors *attempt* to assert control over the reading of a text. With texts viewed as the products of struggles and compromises, policy effects cannot be predicted and solutions will be localised. Thus, there is a strong element of agency in this conception of policy. By contrast, 'policy as discourse' pays greater attention to constraint, but that constraint is still within a moving discursive frame. Policies can become 'regimes of truth' (after Foucault) in which only certain voices (dominant discourses) are heard as authoritative.

In this 1994 book, *Education Reform: A Critical and Post-Structural Approach*, Ball (1994a) broadened the scope from within the educational state to the whole social body of education. He chose the multiple theoretical tools of critical policy analysis, post-structural analysis (with an emphasis on discourses and texts) and critical ethnography on the logic that single theory explanations are not sufficient to deal with the complexities and scope of policy analysis. In particular, he believed that critical ethnography has certain methodological



affinities with Foucault's genealogy as they are both 'disruptive' in the sense of "giving voice to the unheard" (Ball, 1994a, p. 4). The conceptual framework for policy trajectory studies introduced in the 1992 book (Bowe et al., 1992), was also extended to include a 'context of outcomes', which is concerned with the impact of policies on existing social inequalities, as well as a 'context of political strategy', which is concerned with identifying strategies to tackle the inequalities.

As the 1990s proceeded, Ball increasingly urged the use of post-structuralist theory in "shifting the study of education away from a 'technical rationalist' approach ... towards an 'intellectual intelligence' stance that stresses contingency, disidentification and risk-taking" (Ball, 1995, p. 255). It was this postmodern inclination which formed the main basis of the critiques of his works.

### **Critiquing Ball's 'Policy Cycle' Approach**

The following critiques of Ball's work are presented in more or less temporal sequence, in order that the evolving nature of theoretical tools for policy analysis might be rendered more visible.

Dale (1991) identified Ball's teasing out of the 'sensitising concept' of the New Right as the principal strength of *Politics and Policy Making in Education* (Ball, 1990b). However, he argued that Ball's thorough development of the ideological dimension of policy contrasted with his underdevelopment of the political and economic dimensions. Ball's prioritisation of 'agency' over a more structural emphasis was a major weakness in Dale's opinion. White and Crump (1993) were more positive in emphasising the important contribution of Ball's work, although they believed that he had "fallen a little too much under the spell of Monseigneur (sic) Foucault" (White and Crump, 1993, p. 417).

Lingard (1993) identified Ball's framework for policy analysis as useful, but he rejected the dualism promulgated in *Reforming Education and Changing Schools* (Bowe et al., 1992) between state control (Dale-style) and the policy cycle (Ball-style) as inappropriate both theoretically and politically. He maintained that Dale's position was not so different from that of Ball and colleagues, quoting in evidence Dale's assertion (1992) that severing policy implementation from formulation involved a misunderstanding of the role of the state, a position also taken by Ball. Lingard suggested that some of the differences in perspective between Dale and Ball were due to the fact that Dale's work was theoretically driven, leading to an overplay of the unity of the state and Ball's work was empirically driven, leading to an overplay of local autonomy. Lingard was uneasy with what he saw as the 'washing away' of the role of the state in Ball's later work which focused on local sites of policy practice. He maintained that state structure is a mediating influence at both the central and local sites, and he argued the need for a more sophisticated theory of the state to be incorporated into Ball's notion of a policy cycle.

Henry (1993) also criticised Ball's "postmodern flight from 'totalising' structural analyses" (p. 102). More specifically, she believed that Ball's account of the policy process was missing some engagement with neo-Marxist and feminist perspectives, as well as a reconceptualisation of the contemporary state and its relationship to education (similar to Lingard's view above). Henry criticised Ball's dichotomy between 'policy as text' and 'policy as discourse' and she wanted to see these different conceptions brought together rather than operate in opposition. Ball's response (1993a) was to agree with some of what Henry had said, but to reiterate the contrast between the 'messiness' of policy realities and the 'cleanliness' of the abstract 'bigger picture'. He supported the view that post-structural analysis which highlights struggle and resistance is important for developing a theory of, and for, change.

In contrast to Henry's opinion, Evans, Davies and Penney (1994) saw the 'policy as text' and 'policy as discourse' distinction as more useful and endorsed much of what Ball had to say in the 1993 "exercise in theoretical heurism" (Ball, 1993b, p. 10). They viewed his 'policy as discourse' (with its notion of constraint) as a check on the postmodernism inherent in his 'policy as text' (which celebrates human agency). However, they did not believe that the Foucauldian conception of discursive power (as exercised or practised rather than possessed) could capture positional and material forms of power which they attribute to the government ('state'). They were concerned that when the subject disappears in Foucauldian analysis, so too does positional authority.

An overall positive response to *Reforming Education and Changing Schools* (Bowe et al., 1992) was evident from Fitz and Halpin (1994). They were particularly supportive of the way in which the authors sought to move beyond the separation of policy formulation and implementation by conceptualising practitioners at the micro level as important in policy interpretation, rather than simply being concerned with policy execution. However, Fitz and Halpin characterised this work as part of the more recent 'bottom up' approach to policy, and thus subject to inherent limitations such as overemphasising the ability of the periphery to frustrate the centre and not sufficiently analysing structural constraints.

Troyna (1994) also argued that more of an emphasis on a macro structural approach would offer greater insight. He maintained that local autonomy in educational decision making is restricted, although he envisaged that contradictions and contestations within the state allow for avenues of change and resistance. However, Troyna did acknowledge that Ball "offers new ways of seeing the policy making process and challenges some of the conventional wisdoms associated with the formation and diffusion of policy" (p. 71).

In response to Ball's call in the *Journal of Education Policy* for articles on policy theory dialogue and debate, Hatcher and Troyna (1994) offered some strong criticisms of Ball's work. In common with most other critics cited above, they blamed the influence of Foucault for "the most striking inconsistencies and contradictions in Ball's works" (p. 161). They noted that resistance in Foucault's terms is as fragmented and decentralised as his conception of power itself, and they argued that to effectively oppose government policy, resistance needs to be more collective and active than suggested by a micro political focus. Further, they maintained that Ball does not resolve the theoretical gap between pluralism and Marxism as he claimed because his stance clearly favoured pluralism. They argued strongly for greater acknowledgment of the role of the state in controlling policy outcomes. In a spirited defence, Ball claimed that Hatcher and Troyna's argument was structurally determined and static (Ball, 1994b). He questioned their binary of Marxism versus pluralism and emphasised variations within each perspective.

A review essay of Ball's 1994 book, *Education Reform: A Critical and Post-structural Approach*, Lingard (1996) highlighted Ball's significant contributions, both theoretically and empirically. Lingard again referred to the ongoing juxtaposition of state control and policy cycle approaches in the literature, but he criticised both for ignoring the processes of globalisation and its impact on the state. He argued that globalisation reduces the policy options available to the state. Further, Lingard argued that feminist reinterpretation of Ball's research was required because the 1994 book did not consider gender (or racial) effects, although it looked at the effects of education reforms on social class. Lingard concluded that postmodern analysis alone does not easily render a political strategy to combat the social injustices revealed by Ball's research. However, Taylor (1997) identified Ball's addition of contexts of 'outcomes' and 'political strategy' to his policy cycle framework as evidence that he was not neglecting political struggle against structural oppression, and therefore the wider power relations involved in working towards social justice.

It is pertinent to conclude this section by briefly examining how Ball identified his own theoretical perspective. In his 1994 book there was an acknowledgment of the statist position, along with an urging to *add* a pluralist dimension: "Any decent theory of education policy must attend to the workings of the state. But any decent theory of education policy must not be limited to a state control perspective" (Ball, 1994a, p. 10). It is this intention to straddle the modernist/postmodernist divide which forms the underlying rationale for the conceptual framework offered in this paper.

### **Drawing Together a Conceptual Framework for Policy Analysis**

The approach taken here is to synthesise a conceptual framework for policy analysis which draws on both state-centred (modernist-oriented) and policy cycle (postmodernist-oriented) perspectives. It is grounded in the increasing acknowledgment of the benefits of 'theoretical eclecticism' (Cibulka, 1994; Scribner, Reyes & Fusarelli, 1994; Ball, 1997; Taylor, 1997; Ozga, 2000), on the assumption that combining theoretical perspectives offers complementary analytic 'tools', and therefore a more 'complete picture' than any one theory alone. The intention in this paper is not to produce 'grand theory' but a useful framework for critical analysis of policy, which Ozga (2000) argues is disappearing from policy work under the prevailing economic ideology.

The policy cycle proposed by Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) forms the basis of the conceptual framework developed here, with a focus on contexts of influence, policy text production and practices/effects. The other two contexts of outcomes and political strategies later added by Ball (1994) are not considered in detail, but this should not detract from the importance of examining the impact of policies on social justice.

A number of modifications to the policy cycle approach are adopted to take into account criticisms of his theoretical approaches, as outlined earlier. The first modification is to extend Ball's terrain from within an individual nation-state to the global context, as suggested by Lingard (1996) and later by Ball himself (1997). Although globalisation lacks precise definition, it generally refers to the interconnectedness of the world (economic, cultural, social and technological dimensions), through compression of time and space (Robertson, 1992), and it is often associated with a shift towards a market ideology which privileges economic discourses (Marginson, 1999). Globalisation has implications for the nature of the nation-state, and therefore "a consideration of globalisation factors needs to be incorporated into any policy analysis of national developments" (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997, p. 59).

The second modification is to incorporate state-centred constraint to a greater extent than evident in Ball's policy cycle work. The approach is *state-centred* to emphasise the central role often taken by governments in policy, but not *state controlled* which implies a top-down implementation model (Raab, 1994). It is proposed that a non-linear policy trajectory be constructed in order to track the continuous transformations between macro and micro levels of the policy process. The contexts of the policy cycle operate at all levels of the policy trajectory, highlighting the struggles over influences, policy texts, practices/effects, outcomes and political strategies. While empirical studies at the micro level are considered integral to fully understanding the policy process, the 'bigger picture' is still kept in mind throughout the analysis of the trajectory.

The third modification to Ball's policy cycle is to highlight explicitly the interlinkages between different levels and contexts of the policy process, as Taylor (1997) suggested, by examining how these contexts continually relate to each other. For example, possible avenues and mechanisms for feedback from micro level influences, texts, practices/effects, outcomes and

political strategies which contribute to the reconstruction of policy text at the macro level need to be explored.

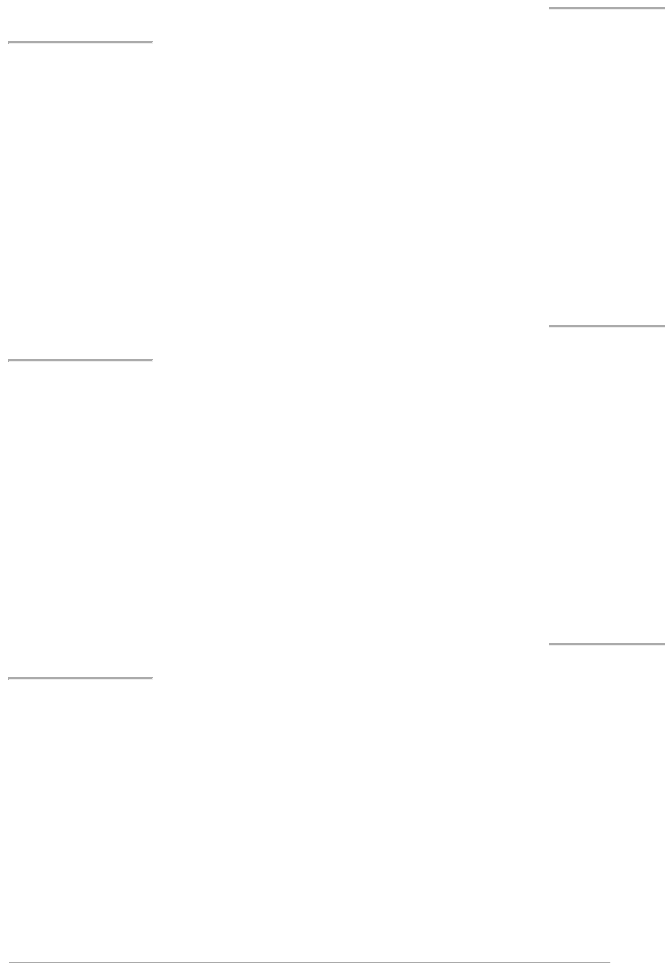
Figure 2 below offers a modified policy cycle framework, in particular to incorporate a greater degree of state-centred constraint and focus a little more on interconnections between the contexts. This framework is certainly not meant to be a 'read' as a model to be applied, unchanged, in a broad range of policy examples, but simply to provide one possible 'tool' for policy analysis. The different elements of the framework are explained below Figure 2, but the influences, policy texts and practices/effects are all clearly evident.

## Figure 2

### A Modified Policy Cycle:

#### Incorporating Macro Constraint and Micro Agency

#### Influences



The **influences** are enclosed within the shaded box to indicate that they frame the entire policy process. The left hand side of the box separates the macro, intermediate and micro levels of the policy trajectory, but there may be fewer, or more, discernible levels in the particular policy process under investigation. Influences feed into the policy text production at each level, as represented by the horizontal arrows moving from left to right within the box. Macro level influences should include the potential for global and international (2) impacts on the policy process. An analysis of micro level influences will involve teasing out specific localised contexts within different types of institutions, based on the organisational history, geography, social and cultural dimensions. Micro level influences may also vary *within* an institution, as well as *between* institutions.

Interconnections between the different levels of **policy text** production are symbolised by arrows pointing in two directions, with the size of the arrows indicating the relative strength of top-down and bottom-up processes in the particular policy under investigation. In the policy case represented in Figure 2 where the downward arrows are larger than the upward arrows, the power of the policy elite to control the policy process is greater than the power of micro level practitioners to construct and interpret their own version of the policy process. Although policy **practices/effects** can occur at any level, the primary focus is on micro level practices which are often the subject of the macro level policy text. The oblique arrow connecting micro influences and micro effects indicates that localised context of individual institutions can directly influence the nature of practices/effects at that site, rather than operating through the official policy text. Thus, the policy effects emerging from the bottom of the box are produced by the complex interactions of the 'influences' and 'text production' at different levels. Although only two arrows are shown, the practices/effects are multiple, with some cycling back to become influence factors again at the three different levels of the trajectory. Other policy effects do not cycle back as influences. Overall, this figure suggests that there is a plurality of contexts and multiple trajectories to be considered simultaneously throughout a policy process.

It is important to indicate that the arrows shown in Figure 2 are not the only ones possible, but they are likely to represent the major flows in a policy process. The intention of this conceptual framework is to begin to depict the messiness of the policy process (postmodern perspective), but not to be so overwhelmed by the messiness that the policy process is rendered beyond systematic analysis. The 'bigger picture' (modernist perspective) is not lost.

The balance between macro constraint and micro agency would be expected to vary with different policies, but it is important to consider both. The concept of 'policy networks' may be one way to bridge the gap between top-down and bottom-up views of the policy process. Raab (1994, p. 13) has defined policy networks as "a generic label for different types of relationships between the state and interest groups in the policy process" which highlight the interconnections between the state and other actors. Capano (1996) and Popkewitz (1996) also emphasise the value of an analysis based on networks, to break down linear approaches to policy. Certainly the combined effect of the multiple trajectories as depicted in Figure 2 above looks like a network of interrelationships in which neither the macro level state nor policy practitioners at the micro level has absolute power.

Thus, the theoretical framework adopted here attempts to move beyond mutually exclusive dichotomies to incorporate both state-centred and policy cycle perspectives. I agree with Taylor (1997) that the oppositional nature of these perspectives has been somewhat of an unhelpful 'beat-up'. A continuum between the extremes of modernist (state-centred) and postmodernist (policy cycle) theoretical perspectives could acknowledge the variations within each perspective, as well as potential overlap between perspectives.

## **Applying the Framework: Interrogating a Policy Process**

What are the implications of the theoretical discussion above for actually conducting policy analysis? In my own policy analysis work, I have separated out the different contexts of the policy process for empirical studies, while acknowledging that the policy process is continuous. The assumption is that struggles— or ‘contested terrain (Ozga, 2000) – will be evident in each context, contributing to the ‘messy realities’ (Ball, 1994) of the policy process.

Below I pose some of the questions which might be used to interrogate a particular policy process, grouped according to three of the different contexts of the policy cycle: ‘influences’, ‘text production’ and ‘practices/effects’. Specific questions about the contexts of ‘outcomes’ and ‘political strategies’ are not included at this point, but such a return to the ‘bigger picture’ of social inequalities should occur after an analysis of micro level policy practices. Each of these contexts can occur anywhere in the policy trajectory from macro to micro levels.

I emphasise that these questions are offered very tentatively and are certainly not to be treated as a definitive checklist, or as exhaustive of all possibilities. Also, these questions should not be read in isolation, as they are drawn from the preceding discussion and are only really meaningful within the parameters set by that discussion. The questions are offered as a ‘menu’ from which the researcher might select depending upon the specifics of the policy process under investigation, and the theoretical positioning of the researcher around the cusp of modernist and postmodernist perspectives. They might be seen as an elaboration of the ‘why’, ‘how’ and ‘what’ of policy analysis (Kenway, 1990), which Gale (1999) labels as ‘ideology’, ‘discourse’ and ‘text’ respectively. The ‘why now’ of policy analysis (Taylor et al, 1997) is also added.

### **Context of Influence**

#### ***What struggles are occurring to influence the policy?***

- Are global influences and trends evident in this policy domain?
- Are there international influences being brought to bear? If so which are the key nation-states involved?
- How are global and international influences operating?
- To what extent are global and international level influences mediated within the nation-state?
- What are the prevailing ideological, economic and political conditions?
- Who are the policy elite and what interests do they represent?
- Which other interest groups are attempting to influence policy?
- Which interests are most/least powerful and why?
- Over what time period did the context of influence evolve before the policy was constructed?



## **Context of policy text production**

### ***What struggles are occurring in the production of the policy text?***

- When did the construction of the policy text begin, and 'why now'?
- Which interest (stakeholder) groups are represented in the production of the policy text and which are excluded?
- What processes are used to construct the policy text and why?
- What compromises are made between the different interest (stakeholder) groups and how were they achieved?
- Whose interests are the policy intended to serve?
- What are the dominant discourses of the policy text and which discourses are excluded?
- What is the stated intention or purpose of the policy?
- Are there any 'hidden' agendas?
- Which values are reflected in the policy?
- What are the issues that constitute the focus of the policy, and do they relate to global/international policy agendas?
- What are the key concepts of the policy?
- What is the format of the policy and why?
- What is the language of the policy and why?
- Are there inconsistencies and contradictions in the policy text?
- Who is the intended audience of the policy text?
- How accessible or understandable is the policy text to the audience?
- Are the steps for 'implementation' set out as part of the policy text?
- Is the 'implementation' funded?
- Is there a specified mechanism to evaluate the policy?

## **Context of practice/effects**

### ***What struggles are occurring over the policy practices/effects?***

- Is this policy being practiced in a wide variety of localised contexts?

- How different are the policy practices between, and within, different localised sites?
- Are global/international influences evident in the policy practices at local levels?
- Who *can* access the policy and who *does* access it?
- How open is the policy to interpretation by practitioners?
- How well is the policy received?
- Who put the policy into practice?
- What processes are used to put the policy into practice and why?
- To what extent is the policy (actively or passively) resisted?
- Is resistance collective or individual?
- To what extent is the policy transformed within individual institutions?
- How predictable were the policy practices/effects?
- Are practitioners at the local level empowered by the policy?
- Are practitioners at the local level able to respond rapidly to meet localised needs in this policy domain?
- What are the unintended consequences?
- What is the impact of the policy on different localised groupings based on class, gender, ethnicity, rurality and disability?
- Are there winners and losers?

After separating out the various contexts of the policy process (influences, text production and practices/effects) in this manner, it is important to bring them back together again, and to focus on the interlinkages and the 'bigger picture'. For example, comparisons might be made between the stated intent of the macro level policy text and the actual policy practices/effects at local sites. Comparisons might also be made between the policy effects for different social groupings at the micro level (based on class, gender, ethnicity, rurality, disability) and a policy rhetoric of social justice (contexts of 'outcomes' and 'political strategies'). Discussion might revolve around the extent to which the particular policy process under investigation is state-centred (emphasising macro constraint) or allows freedom for practitioners to interpret in their own ways (emphasising micro agency).

After the interrogation of a particular policy process in this way, a 'meta' interrogation of the conceptual framework itself is required to identify its strengths, weaknesses and usefulness in the analysis of the policy process in question. Personally, I have found this framework to be useful in analysing policy processes on the occasions that I have applied it, but this may not always be the case. The hope is simply that this conceptual framework might add to our 'toolboxes' for policy analysis, which will further empower teacher-researchers to actively engage with education policy processes and thus re-invigorate a professional autonomy which is threatened when policy is defined only in top-down, state-control terms.

In the papers which follow in this symposium, three doctoral researchers employ variations of this approach in three different policy domains. These applications are not all the same because the policies and their contexts are different, and the researchers have chosen to emphasise different aspects of the policy process. Thus, they have found it necessary to rejig the analytic framework to suit their particular purposes.

The specific policy processes which are analysed in the following three papers are located under the umbrella of the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA). However, it is important to emphasise that the policy domains and trends they represent are 'global' phenomena, and may be recognisable in many other contexts in Australia as well as other countries, albeit in somewhat different mutations. The first paper to follow analyses the policy 'Students at Educational Risk', and tracks this top-down policy process from the influences operating prior to its release by EDWA 'Head Office' (macro level) through District Offices (intermediate level) to policy practices in individual schools (micro level). The analysis highlights the contradictory tensions and transformations along the policy trajectory, and uses interviews with staff at all of these levels as its primary source of data. By contrast, the second paper employs interviews with students (providing 'voice' to the often unheard in education policy) to analyse the EDWA policy 'Local Area Education Planning' which has involved school amalgamations, closures and the emergence of middle schools. This paper provides a bottom-up view of a top-down policy process. The third paper focuses more on the bottom-up generation of policy in analysing the way in which policy on single sex classes within particular co-educational EDWA schools is produced and practiced, as there is no central EDWA policy on the creation of such classes. However, the analysis also locates this micro perspective within the 'bigger picture' of broader national and state policy contexts in the field of gender and education. Together, these three case studies of policy analysis point to the practical ways in which the conceptual framework offered here can be applied to illuminate a number of different education policy processes.

Note:

1. The term 'teacher-researcher' is used to mean the teacher as researcher and vice versa, breaking down notions of a divide between the two.
2. Distinctions have been made between 'globalisation' as world systems which have a life of their own, and 'internationalisation' which presupposes nation-states as the essential unit (Marginson 1999), but sometimes these terms are used interchangeably (incorrectly, in my view).

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