

The Logic of Equity Practice in Education Queensland 2010

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Introduction

Educational inequality remains an on-going problem in Australia and elsewhere, and equitable provision of education remains on Commonwealth and state education agendas, if less centrally in recent years.

The particular concern of this paper is the on going debate about how to balance two key aspects of social justice - redistribution and recognition of difference - in education policy. A number of writers have commented on the difficulty of resolving these two aspects in policy and practice, and Fraser (1997, p. 13) has referred to *the redistribution-recognition dilemma*. Some writers, such as Ian Hunter (1994) have argued that conceptualisations of equality within state education bureaucracies have always been marred by contradictions, paradoxes and ambiguity (see also Singh and Sinclair, 2001). Hunter has suggested that these tensions arise from the contradictory purposes of mass public education.

On the one hand, equality has been conceptualised 'as the technical objective of government, to achieve a socially optimal distribution of trained capacities and lifestyles'; and on the other hand, it has been 'represented as an absolute moral right to self-realisation, claimed on behalf of our common humanity or universal moral personality' (Hunter, 1994: 95). These modes of conceptualising equality have produced different substantive conceptions of the scope of education, different expectations of the school system, and different ethical and political demeanours in those attempting to strive for equality (Singh and Dooley 2001, p. 336)

In a previous research study, Taylor and Henry (2003) explored the way equity issues were conceptualised in Education Queensland's *QSE 2010* reform strategy (Education Queensland 2000a) and related documents. It was concluded that the strategy promoted a reasonably strong social justice agenda, particularly in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. However, questions were raised concerning the ways in which equity issues were conceptualised.

The main document referred to 'at risk groups' as 'those who on the basis of culture, linguistic background, gender, location, or socio-economic status have been disadvantaged ...' (Education Queensland 2000a, p. 17). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with a disability were also identified. In a subsequent document specifically dealing with equity issues, *Building Success Together. The framework for students at educational risk* (Education Queensland 2000b), the term 'students at educational risk' is used, and it is argued that it is necessary to consider 'another map of educational risk' (p. 3) as well as 'the needs of particular target groups'. This seemed to reflect an approach which attempted to reconcile redistributive aspects of social justice with the recognition of difference.

However, Taylor and Henry (2003) commented that in this document and an associated information leaflet, there seemed to be a shift away from any attempt to deal with equality and difference simultaneously. For example, the framework document stated: 'single dimension target group strategies are no longer enough to explain the interrelated and cumulative social cultural, geographic and economic impacts on communities, particularly in localised settings' (Education Queensland 2000b, p.3). Additionally, the information leaflet about the framework stated that stereotyping about learning capacity 'based on single factors

such as race, geography, cultural or linguistic background, socioeconomic circumstance or gender, [is] inappropriate in a world where flexibility and adaptability of skills and knowledge are a primary requisite for successful participation in work, families and communities' (Education Queensland 2000c, unpagged). Taylor and Henry (2003) were critical of the fact that target group strategies were dismissed as 'no longer appropriate', and that poverty issues were 'buried' in the broad category of 'students at educational risk'.

The research reported in this paper investigated the ways in which equity and 'difference' were being conceptualised in the implementation process of *QSE 2010*. In particular we were interested in how the tensions between redistributive and recognitive approaches to social justice were being managed within the bureaucracy in the initial stages of the implementation process.

The paper documents differences and tensions in language and framing of equity issues across the bureaucracy. We suggest that these tensions reflect the different 'logics of practice' (Bourdieu 1992, 1998) operating within the bureaucracy, and that in the pursuit of social justice in education, the 'balance' between redistributive and recognitive approaches may need to change depending on the particular field of practice involved.

Conceptualising social justice in education

A brief overview of the main trends in conceptualising social justice /equity issues in education policy is relevant to the concerns of this paper. The ways in which the issues have been conceptualised and addressed has changed over the years, reflecting developments in theory and research, and changes in the broader economic and political context (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard and Henry 1997, Taylor and Henry 2000, Henry 2001). It should be noted that there are no absolute meanings of the concepts associated with equity and social justice and educational disadvantage, rather, the terms are constituted historically and politically in particular contexts. Further, '... these constructions never constitute a coherent set of ideas but rather a pragmatic expression of what appears feasible' (Taylor et al. 1997, p. 132).

Central to the new struggles over social justice in education is what Giddens (1998, 2000) has described as the lessening holds of tradition, and the democratising of all social relationships. Specifically, Giddens (1998) identifies three aspects of the democratising of social relationships in late modernity: (1) 'relationships have to be made and sustained much more actively than was the case three or four decades ago' (p.135) (2) '... men, women and children, are equals before the law' and 'relations between equals ... have to be negotiated [and] ... depend upon active trust', and (3) many contemporary relationships are formed largely through dialogue; they have no other anchor' (p.136).

There are two key aspects of social justice in these 'new times' (Hall 1996) of 'late or reflexive modernity' (Giddens 2000) : the economic and the cultural. Traditional approaches have been concerned mainly with economic inequality and about the *redistribution of resources*. Recently, more attention has been given to cultural aspects of inequality and the *recognition of difference*. Thus the terms which originally focused mainly on class inequalities have been reworked to address inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, disability and sexuality. There have been extensive debates about these issues during the 1990s and they will only be reviewed briefly here.

There are three main *redistributive* traditions of thinking about social justice: liberal-individualism, social democratic and market-individualism (Taylor et al 1997, p. 128, Henry 2001). Within *liberal-individualism*, there is a focus on ensuring individuals have equal opportunities to access education. It is seen as a 'weak' approach to equity policy: critics

argue that the focus on the individual rather than the system is based on a deficit view of 'underachieving' individuals.

Within the *social-democratic* view, the aim is to produce equality of outcomes in schooling between social groups. Educational inequality is seen as related to the way society is structured: some groups will perform better or worse than others in education because of the way education is linked to privilege in the social structure – according to class, gender, race and ethnicity and geography. In this context, strategies focus on making schools more accessible to excluded groups, and may include allocating additional resources to educationally disadvantaged groups.

Market-individualism increased in popularity in most western countries through the 1990s. Here, equity is again conceptualised in individualistic terms, and the emphasis moves away from social redistribution to the individual's right to choose. It is argued that competition in the educational market place will result in improved learning outcomes. However critics (eg Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995) have argued that market-based approaches are not effective in producing equitable outcomes.¹

Recognition of difference approaches to equity and social justice do not reject, but attempt to go beyond, a redistributional approach. They recognise the cultural as well as economic dimensions of social justice, and therefore focus attention on the recognition of cultural difference as well as the need to address economic inequalities. They also pay attention to differences *within* groups. These issues are complex, because redistribution and recognition of difference often need to be pursued simultaneously in addressing social injustices. For example, race based inequalities have a socio-economic component which demand a redistributive approach, as well as a cultural component for which a recognition approach is necessary (Fraser 1997). Additional complications arise because some strategies differentiate social groups, while others enhance group differentiation. During the nineties, debates centred on the 'redistribution-recognition dilemma' (Fraser 1997, p. 13); how to reconcile 'equality' and 'difference' in education and social policy. One example of an attempt to integrate the distributional and recognition approaches is seen in Young's (1990) work on social justice based on freedom from five aspects of oppression - exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. Oppression, she argues, cannot be addressed simply by redistributing opportunities and rewards, cultural changes are also required.

A further recent conceptualisation is referred to by Gewirtz (1998) as *justice as mutuality*. This approach is strongly linked to discourses of citizenship, inclusivity and building social capital, and is 'about shifts in the nature of participation, ... about a restructuring of power relations in society' (Gewirtz 1998, p. 473). Similarly, Gale and Densmore (2000) emphasise democratic relationships within and outside the classroom, arguing that democracy is a precondition for social justice. Their view of recognitive justice is based on self determination and participation in decision making for oppressed minority groups, and on taking the standpoint of the least advantaged (Connell 1993).

These more recent conceptualisations of social justice focus broadly on *all students*. For example, inclusive education approaches focus on the particular linguistic and cultural needs of Indigenous students, but also provide Indigenous studies for everyone. This contrasts with the earlier conceptualisations which focussed only on the particular individuals or groups experiencing disadvantage, and where equity policies were developed from a 'mainstream' perspective which often marginalised the particular concerns of cultural minorities.

Education policies have reflected these differing conceptualisations of equity and social justice, sometimes bringing different elements together in an eclectic mix. As Sturman has suggested, '... social justice appears to be ... at yet another crossroads in the politics of

education' (1997 p. 104), with debates about the appropriate approach to be taken, and in particular what should be the appropriate target for programs and funding: individual disadvantaged students, recognised target groups, schools or regions.

Theoretical perspectives

The research is located within the field of critical policy analysis which examines the effects of economic, political and social contexts upon education policy development and implementation (Taylor 1997; Taylor et al. 1997). Our approach views policy making as a struggle over meaning or as the 'politics of discourse' (Yeatman 1990). The work of Fairclough (1992, 2003), which emphasises the relationship between discourse and social relations, and the ideological and political effects of discourse, also informs our methodological approach. Applications of discourse theory allow fine-grained analyses to be conducted within a broader structural framework. They are also useful for identifying competing discourses in the development and implementation stages of policy processes, which may have implications for policy outcomes.

We draw also on Bourdieu's concepts of field/logic of practice in the study, following Thomson (2002), and Lingard, Hayes, Mills and Christie (2003) who apply Bourdieu's theory to their work on principals and leadership.

Bourdieu (1998) views society as a number of overlapping fields of practice, where fields² are defined as socially constituted areas of activity. These fields are autonomous, with their own logics of practice or 'rules of the game', and their own power struggles. Fields 'constitute sites of struggle over a central *stake*' (Peillon 1998, p. 213). An individual's habitus³, their socially constituted dispositions, may be adapted to the demands of a particular field as their professional habitus (Lingard et al 2003). Professionals within a field must acquire a practical sense or 'feel' for the game, that is, a habitus attuned to the specific conditions of the field (Thompson, 1992, p. 27). Strategy, then, can be viewed as the 'habitus in action': 'Strategies are worked out within particular fields which are sites of struggle and which evince certain logics of practice' (Lingard et al 2003, p. 22). These writers emphasize that such strategies are acquired by experience and 'become embodied and turned into second nature' (p. 23).

Lingard et al (2003) use Bourdieu's concepts to explain differing logics of practice in education – arguing that education policy 'derived largely from the political field tends to deal with levels of funding, funding models, structural organisation and so on, rather than with the core aspects of schooling practices, at least as seen by teachers and principals' (p. 24). They further argue that there is a disjunction between the logics of practice of the political field and educational field, particularly in the context of school based management policies. As a result, principals have to negotiate various logics of practice. (See also Ball's (1994) discussion of the relationship between the context of policy text production (the state) and the context of practice (schools).)

Building on this work, we apply these ideas to the bureaucracy – in fact Bourdieu identifies the bureaucratic field as a field of practice (1998, p. 84). However we suggest that the various sections *within* a particular bureaucracy have different logics of practice according to the focus of their work (see also Bernstein, 2000; Singh, 2002). For example, within the education department bureaucracy some sections will be more school oriented, others more oriented towards system wide or workforce concerns. As a result, communication between the various sections is often inadequate and tensions may arise between them. It would be expected that different logics of practice will be evident with respect to equity issues in these sub-fields, particularly given the well documented difficulties in reconciling redistribution and recognition of difference referred to earlier.

Research methods

To investigate these issues we interviewed fourteen ‘key players’ who were involved in the development and early stages of implementation of *QSE 2010*. These included relevant senior bureaucrats in Education Queensland and one influential academic. Three areas of the bureaucracy (as it was then structured) were represented in the interviews: Strategic directions, performance and measurement; Curriculum and assessment; and Workforce and professional development.

The interviews pursued the research questions in a dialectical way as part of a ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Burgess 1984). This approach has been used in other major research studies conducted with key policy actors (eg Henry et al 2001). Interview questions explored how equity issues were being framed, what language was used, what specific groups were being targeted, what programs were being funded, and how outcomes were being monitored. Interviews were approximately an hour in length and were audio taped and later transcribed.

The interview data were supplemented by relevant policy documents and papers associated with the implementation of *QSE 2010*, including material on Education Queensland’s website. This paper, discusses preliminary findings based on the interview data only.

Implementation dilemmas

General issues

Language emerged as an important issue in the interviews – and was clearly significant in the implementation processes. Although the language used in the framework document was ‘students at educational risk’, two years on there were a number of variations in the language used⁴.

..the biggest discussion around this paper has been, you know, who are we actually talking about? [Int. C, SD]

Terms used in the interviews to refer to equity issues were: ‘inclusive’, ‘inclusion’, ‘students at educational risk’, ‘students most at risk’, ‘those who have disengaged, or likely to disengage from schooling’, and ‘at riskness’.

Two people referred explicitly to the lack of a common language to discuss the issues:

I don’t think there is a shared language in a lot of areas in here ..One of the things that I have commented on in the past is there is no shared language which is a deep language to allow, for instance, engineers by the introduction of themselves as engineers it’s a coded language of how to have a deep conversation. There is no shared language in education to have a deep conversation. [Int. A, SD]

... we might use the word ‘inclusive’ but we don’t use it as a common sort of word in that policy. We use more ‘engagement’. I don’t think we have a common understanding in the school communities. ‘Inclusion’ is a word we use in the State sector, not the non-government sector. ‘Inclusion’ is not a word used in the training sector so I mean this reform that we - is for all young people, so I’ve got to make sure the language we use is understood by all. [Int. I, SD]

Several interviewees referred to the background to some of the decisions made about language to be used. For example, there was a pragmatic choice to adopt the ‘new language’ of ‘risk’, preferred by the minister.

I don’t know whether it was cross-government discourse or wherever, but it was that we couldn’t have that old language of social justice or target groups ... The new

language was 'risk'. And so I suppose what we tried to do when we wrote that stuff was ... it was that sort of pragmatism ... to get it as good as it could be – and make it tight re accountabilities ... [Int. G, Academic]

Others, however, rejected the language of risk:

Yeah, so I guess what I'm - I don't use the 'at risk' language very much at all. I try to argue that, you know, kids will become more or less included, more or less enabled or disabled, more or less vulnerable in schooling because of the existence of a number of barriers to participation and so on. [Int. H, C&A]

Another person pointed out the problems with the term, 'inclusion' because of its association with disabilities:

... the struggle that we have at the moment is that inclusion has a strong identification with students with disabilities. So originally it was like integration and people saw that ... integration ... was only part of the issue and so inclusion was more important. And so the struggle that we have is that when we talk about inclusive education people would hear students with disabilities ... And so our difficulty has been and still is trying to broaden the notion of inclusive education and that's a difficult thing. [Int. B, C&A]

Several people referred to problems with 'policy' within the bureaucracy, for example:

There's an anti-policy environment. And I can understand that. I think that the old idea that you can change the system by policy is not one that you can really believe in. [Int. D, C&A]

But there is this notion that there were so many policies and they were just stuff written on paper ... and there were too many for anyone and so they needed to be ... and I know, speaking to people in Ed Queensland now, they think that all of the policy officers and having a big central bureaucracy has taken away from out there in the schools, and it's about the paper production of stuff, rather than the practice. [Int. G, Academic]

Another set up a dichotomy between policy makers and people in schools, and referred to 'policy people' and 'schoolies':

In terms of the policy work I'm doing now ... and it's interesting, I'm not a policy person and it's interesting they want to pick a schoolie to lead ... and that's symbolic in itself

....

And so I work with all these policy people, they have a certain arrogance about it, but that's life. But anyway, so I'm trying to make sure that my understanding about what improves outcomes for kids is integral to our thinking...

They've never worked in a school. It's different to make policy about schools than any other thing, I believe, because schools are unique entities. Unless you have been there and done that, you know, or unless you try and understand it, they just, you know, they make these enormous assumptions... 'Oh, principals can do that', you know? 'Principals can go and find young people that aren't at school and get them back.' [It] doesn't work like that, you know. [Int. I, SD]

These tensions which emerged seemed to reflect different logics of practice within the bureaucracy. One interviewee mentioned the link between the different sections of the bureaucracy and the language used:

So in one way for the political frame you have to - that has to be expressed in a particular language, another language when it comes into this end of the organization and then when you're looking in schools it's different again. [Int. H, C&A]

At the same time, however, we are not implying that the different language used by policy actors is simply a function of different work priorities and practices. Struggles over language are central to defining what counts as social justice in education for particular groups of policy actors. Moreover, these struggles over language or discursive struggles have real material consequences for different groups of teachers and students in schools. Thus, actors positioned within different sub-fields of the bureaucracy are always likely to be engaged in ideological power struggles over defining what counts as social justice in education. The discursive or language terrain is a crucial arena in these power struggles.

Equity issues

In this section we use extracts from the interview data to illustrate in more detail how equity issues were being conceptualised in the different sections of the bureaucracy: Strategic directions, performance and measurement; Curriculum and assessment; and Workforce and professional development. We are specifically interested in analysing how policy actors in sub-fields of the education bureaucracy managed the redistributive and recognitive dimensions of social justice. We use extracts from one interview from each of the areas for illustrative purposes.

From **Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement**, where the approach to equity issues was goal driven, focussed on performance, and driven by evidence, we draw on Interview A:

So in terms of Destination 2010 [implementation document], we are driving that performance agenda putting a real hard edge behind it.

The concept of 'equity' was subsumed in the concept of 'inclusive', with a focus on tracking individual students within the system. Equity is seen as having been an 'add-on', targeting groups on the basis of deficit.

... within the individual focus approach there is no notion of equity. There is a notion of different needs but we are operating that full and inclusive model, full stop. ...

... obviously, what I've articulated here is an inclusive model, that is, diametrically opposed to a model where you have a traditional 1970s, 1980s equity approach. It doesn't mean that you're not interested. It's a systems approach for how you do it.

...

So we have one target group now - and that's every kid, full stop.

This interviewee argued that Education Queensland was adopting a *pro-active intervention model* where difference is treated *as an up-front asset, rather than ... as an add-on*. System solutions are advocated through inclusion and measuring outcomes, and through lighthouse success programs where performance is enhanced by transferring knowledge from successful to less successful schools. Performance is 'the driver', assessed through systematic monitoring:

Once you start tracking every single kid in the State you start seeing some obvious patterns. You start seeing some obvious success stories and you start seeing ways to build bridge patterns between schools that are significantly delivering and those that

are not. You then put in place the analytical framework to allow those sort of research areas to go ahead. If we don't have the research... Some of the ongoing work within the pathways stuff which is just appearing under the ETRF [Education and training for the Future – one aspect of the reform agenda] is about having initial research to actually find out what's happening.

The problem with this approach is that it is individualised: equity issues may be lost within such a view and may be subsumed within individual differences. Trying to ensure that all students succeed in the system is an appropriate goal but to achieve the goal a more targeted approach is needed. Focussing so exclusively on 'performative' aspects of the bureaucracy seems to leave out other aspects of institutional outcomes (see Lyotard, 1985). Further, in referring to difference as an 'up front asset' glosses over inequality and disadvantage, and in some senses could be said to be 'equity blind'.

We draw on Interview B conducted with a senior bureaucrat from the Inclusive Education Unit (now disbanded) as the example from the *Curriculum and Assessment Section*. For this interviewee, *inclusive education* has replaced the concept of equity. The issues are dealt with in the mainstream - but equity is still defined to some extent in terms of previously identified target groups. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and people with disabilities are separated out from all of the remaining 'equity groups' which were grouped together with other 'problem' categories such as behaviour management. This is consistent with the classification used in the document, *Building Success Together. The framework for students at educational risk* document (Education Queensland 2000b), discussed earlier.

... inclusive education covers all of the areas that were previously covered in equity. So, without running the risk of leaving somebody out, things like cultural diversity and linguistic diversity, issues to do with behaviour management, with school disciplinary absences, with bullying, racism ... what else...? English as a second language, gender issues - covering all of those sorts of things and ... including guidance services and learning difficulties in that area. Then issues to do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education - how we can enhance the education that's provided to bring the outcomes, the educational outcomes, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students up to the levels of other students because they are below. And then issues to do with students with disabilities ... all of the policies and structures that sit around supporting students with disabilities to ensure that they receive an appropriate educational service.

The approach guiding the unit is that there are groups of students that the current system does not educate well. The question that needs to be addressed is how to work with the system to ensure that it responds to different groups. How does the bureaucracy mainstream equity issues related to target groups?

When you look at all of the information that we have, whether it be assessment information or simply anecdotal reported information, there are kids that our system is not doing well with. And they're the kids who are Indigenous that the system is not responding well to; there are kids with disabilities that our system struggles with; there are kids who are from socially isolated or geographically isolated; there are kids who are - for whom school is boring and doesn't engage them; there are kids who aren't interested in school and that school doesn't know how to respond to them; there are kids from culturally and linguistically diverse background and so when we looked at all of the areas where the system wasn't doing well and actually could do better that became the area of focus for the inclusive education branch. Because our role then is how we work with the system to improve. How the system responds to all of these groups without setting up separate mechanisms for response - so, actually working with the mainstream to do it ... Rather than saying - well if we've

got a problem with how schools are working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, then we should have a separate program and system – and away we go. We don't want to do that. We want the school to work on this. So our role is then to help the school to do that.

A deficit model is avoided by placing the focus on the system. Equity issues are addressed by a system approach, through inclusion and measuring outcomes. This interviewee explained that:

.. inclusive education is a process that responds to individuals within the system and that it's a process where we're trying to increase presence, access, participation and achievement of all students and how we use those – why we use those terms and what they mean is presence is like – “Well, who are the kids in our schools and in our system and who are the kids who aren't?” And, “Why aren't they in there? And what are we doing about it?” And that can be any kids – you know – like across all of – all of this.

The Inclusive Education Unit contributed to mainstream programs and also managed targeted programs for Indigenous students and students at educational risk. This interviewee, who raised the problems with the term 'inclusion' because of its association with disabilities, said that they would not use the term 'disadvantaged' to refer to students:

We would use the term 'at educational risk' because that puts the onus or focus on the system, rather than on the individual.

The system operates on the principle of differential distribution of resources to schools, and schools may or may not choose to apply resources differentially to students 'at educational risk'.

So we are still providing resources - differentially - but we are trying to build the ownership of the school in terms of the issues for their population.

... So, rather than try and characterise the school we would say to the school - what are your issues?

... In other words what - when you're working with the community - what have you identified as being the issues for you as a school and that could be a whole range of things.

In this context where schools are not named as disadvantaged as they were in the past, equity issues are likely to easily become marginalized. Further, the lack of relevant data for schools to use to identify the key issues for which they are seeking departmental funding was raised as a problem.

I think that the perception is probably more advanced than reality.. in that there's not a lot of data ...collected at schools and reported back on that is high level data. ...

There are all the standardised assessments, but then the problem with those assessments is that a lot of students who have English as a second language, or who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or who have a disability are exempted.

Further, performance requires improvement across target groups, but gathering data about target groups could reinforce difference, which is seen to be undesirable. So the data that would provide information about inequality and difference is not collected. Only retention rates are compared for Indigenous students and students with disabilities.

And ... we're caught - because if we put in separate identification and measures for all of those populations of students then we are reinforcing the difference, rather than

trying to work with the system to be - to look at them - to respond to the difference but not actually reinforce and institutionalise the difference.

This interviewee raised recognition of difference in discussing the approach to cultural difference:

... culture is one of the ones where we are trying to move the agenda. We would talk about cultural affirmation. ... In what we're trying to do ... but not limit that to saying that that's only for the kids who are different... Like cultural affirmation is something that we all need and for people who are in the dominant culture that happens automatically. So what we would want to be doing - well, what we try and do is to really unpack that for kids. So through the curriculum it's to unpack ... the fact that one person's culture won't get questioned because they're the dominant culture but another person's culture does. ... And how does that impact on them as an individual and their culture and all that sort of thing. So we would try and unpack that across all of the cultures. ... Not to actually just say, 'It's for those who are the minority cultures'.

This person's expertise in equity issues was evident in their understandings of the complexity of the issues: there are issues for those who are from cultural minority backgrounds as well as issues for the mainstream. The issue of active citizenship was also raised in this interview reflecting ideas coming from more recent conceptualisations of social justice discussed earlier in the paper.

A rather different perspective on equity issues was put forward by a bureaucrat in the **Workforce and Professional Development** area, illustrated by extracts from Interview J. The terminology used here was 'diversity', where it was seen to be important that the workforce was diverse and representative of the student population.

The student population is already diverse and we have a workforce that's I wouldn't say 'generic' but it doesn't reflect the population or the community that ... they serve. So while we do have Indigenous teachers and workers and whatever, there's no way in the world that we can actually say that that reflects the student population. It doesn't, it's way off... Equally if we're talking about ensuring that education is the, if you like, major influence over people's success in early and later life and a key component of that is the number of people in some communities who choose not to continue to participate in education, then one of the issues around that is to what extent there's a mismatch between the teaching that occurs and the learning that needs to take place in those communities So ... we would make the case that the workforce does not reflect the community populations that we work with.

...

If you have an increasingly diverse population, which we are, and you haven't got an increasingly diverse workforce that matches that, then essentially, what you will have - and over time - is a marginalised group of people who don't contribute to economic success, they actually detract from it. So the notion of trying to achieve a more diverse workforce is to actually have as many people from as many cultures working successfully to achieve that notion of educated learning as part of being a member of productive societies.

...

So when I say it's becoming increasingly diverse, it's noticeably more diverse than it was because more people from different cultures have found their voice...

Here equity is viewed as relatively uncomplicated – diversity is harnessed by targeting equity groups otherwise some groups are likely to be marginalised from the learning agenda. There seems to be a lack of awareness of the complexities of this approach, particularly in terms of the politics of representation. Although attention is given to diversity, this interviewee draws on the discourse of ‘productive diversity’ which is driven by economic rather than social imperatives, and is associated with market approaches to social justice.

Discussion and implications

In this paper, we have explored how a number of key policy actors in the Education Queensland bureaucracy attempted to manage the contradictory, conflicting and paradoxical components of the redistributive and recognitive aspects of equity. We suggest that the different accounts provided by those interviewed may reflect their differential positioning within various sub-fields of the education bureaucracy. Those interviewed were variously responsible for policy production, policy recontextualization and implementation. Moreover, the various sub-fields of the field of policy recontextualization and implementation: Strategic Directions, Performance and Measurement; Curriculum and Assessment Section; Workforce and Professional Development – are likely to regulate the habitus of bureaucrats and therefore their accounts of educational equality.

The interview data revealed differences in approaches to equity issues and in language used in the three sections of the bureaucracy, perhaps to some extent reflecting the ambiguity in the original documents discussed earlier in the paper. There was no clear conceptualisation of ‘students at educational risk’ beyond a rejection of a deficit approach. In the interviews which we reported in detail, all three of the people interviewed explicitly distanced themselves from deficit approaches to addressing inequality in the past. However, they did this in different ways: in Interview A, difference was seen as an asset; in Interview B, the emphasis was placed on the system as the problem (and the solution) rather than on the student; in Interview J, diversity was seen as an advantage for the organisation and relevant to learning issues for equity groups. The agents are aware that they can no longer use a language that may depict particular groups in negative ways, and recognise their own symbolic power position in evoking and articulating performative discourses (Bourdieu 1992).

However shifts in language are not in themselves enough to effect more fundamental changes in approach which are necessary in implementing major educational reforms. They may easily result in equity issues slipping off agendas, or becoming recontextualised as individual differences, as seen in Interview A. While the shift in language to view difference as an asset is apparently positive, it ignores the existence of both material disadvantage and cultural oppression, and could be said to be ‘equity blind’. Further, avoiding the language of ‘equity groups’ means that the particular needs of these groups are glossed over, and economic and cultural differences become recontextualised as individual differences.

There was evidence from the interviews that the introduction of the ‘students at educational risk’ language was influenced by political considerations. Despite the intention to avoid deficit notions, it seemed that the *Framework for Students at Educational Risk* was in fact widely read in deficit terms. According to this framework, principals were required to identify individual students at educational risk and develop strategies to address this risk. As a result, rather than avoiding a deficit approach, the framework actually reinforced it: *The deficit lies with identification you might say [Int. D, C&A]*. Although a principal might identify a whole group of students at educational risk, for the process of identification, it was necessary to develop strategies specific to the needs of individual students.

Problems also emerged with the subsequent move to use the term *inclusion*, apparently *at the level of language only [Int. D, C&A]*. Once again there were political pressures behind this shift. It had been intended to define the term inclusion broadly to encompass social justice

issues in general. However, this proved to be difficult because of the association of the term with disabilities, and its 'capture' by the disabilities area. As a result, it came to have a much narrower meaning within the bureaucracy than had been intended. Once again this shows the relationship between language, power relations and social change (Fairclough 1992, 2003), and there is scope for future research to explore these issues further at a fine grained level using CDA.

Similarly, but in a different context, the concepts of difference and educational risk were 'captured' by the demand for numbers and accountability, reflecting market versions of social justice. One interviewee from the Inclusive Education Unit said that as soon as the issues of difference and students having multiple identities were raised, they were told that more complex multi-variate analysis was needed:

... and at that point it became an issue owned by the data people... And they started to put together all these graphs and pie charts and whatever, that weren't telling us anything new. ... So it became a data issue rather than, 'Let's create a more accessible way of talking about kids and their lives and their families'. [Int. D, C&A]

As a result, this person said that people from the Inclusive Education Unit felt excluded from engagement with the issues: *Now we've got neither target groups not anything else, except educational risk* . [Int. D, C&A]

In relation to the redistribution-recognition dilemma, of the three interviews analysed in detail, only Interviewee B showed awareness of the complexities of the issues, of the need to balance both aspects of social justice. More awareness of cultural issues, of the fact that recognition of difference is relevant for *all* students, and of more recent conceptualisations of social justice, was also shown in this interview.

Conceptualising social justice needs to take account of the politics of cultural identity in these new globalised and globalizing times (see Singh 2004), and of the politics of representation around issues of cultural identity. There are two analytic dimensions to representational politics, namely, delegation and depiction. A policy actor maybe delegated to re-present the interests of a particular social group. For example, a person identifying as Indigenous may be *delegated* to re-present the social justice education concerns of Indigenous students. Struggles over language and other symbols used to *depict* Indigenous students and communities will be central to the re-presentational policy work of this Indigenous policy actor (see Bourdieu 1992).

This illustrates the complexities of the political struggles within the subfields of the bureaucracy we have examined. There was some support in the study for the notion of different logics of practice in these sub-fields, with some evidence of a lack of communication between different sections, a problem with 'policy', and a dichotomy between 'policy people' and 'schoolies'. Further, in the three interviews reported in depth, the focus was mainly on *system* issues in interviews A and I, and more on *school* issues in interview B. However, this interviewee seemed to be able to negotiate between the different logics of practice in other sub-fields, and discussed system issues as well. Further, we would suggest that the focus on school issues may be related to the greater awareness about recognition of difference and justice as mutuality (Gewirtz 1998) seen in Interview B. However, this study is based on a small number of interviews and is therefore limited. These issues need to be investigated further in a more comprehensive study.

For example, Bourdieu argues that the discourses produced by professionals are determined by two broad sets of constraints: one derives from the logic of the field itself, in which professionals are competing with one another, taking stances *vis-à-vis* one another. In this respect, their utterances make sense only in relation to other utterances issued from other positions in the same field (Thompson 1992):

It is for this reason that a specific field appears to many people outside of this field as a kind of esoteric culture with which they have little sympathy or empathy: they feel distanced from it, not so much because they fail to understand the words, but because they fail to understand why a distinction between words could matter so much, since they are not themselves involved in the constant attempt to define a distinctive position in the field. (Thompson 1992, p. 27)

The second set of constraints derives, not from the field itself, but from the relation between the field and a broader range of social positions, groups and processes. Therefore, as Thompson explains, if we want to understand these relationships fully, 'there is no alternative to a careful, rigorous reconstruction of the fields and of the links between the positions and agents within them' (Thompson 1992, p. 29). Additionally, in relation to our study, it is clear that these sub-fields are being regularly reconstituted due to restructuring. For example, as mentioned, since the interviews were conducted the Inclusive Education Unit has been disbanded and equity issues have been 'mainstreamed'. Currently there are concerns about these developments and the implications for the social justice agenda outlined in 2000 in *QSE 2010*.

The study reported in this paper examined struggles over conceptions of social justice in education by key policy actors. We argued that the discourses articulated by policy actors on issues of social justice were in part constituted by their positioning within sub-fields of the education bureaucracy. Moreover, we argued that the *stakes are high* in these struggles, and that education systems are currently at a 'cross-roads' in terms of redefining social justice issues. While we are 'not in favour of the neo-liberal onslaught on welfare' (Giddens 1998, p.163), we do recognize that education bureaucracies need to be restructured and issues of social justice re-conceptualized, so that people acquire the social capital, that is, 'capabilities and responsibilities' (p. 163) needed to live active and full lives in these new times. In this paper, we have begun a conversation on how key policy actors working within the Education Queensland bureaucracy are struggling to redefine social justice for these new times.

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Notes

1. School choice policies may be considered to be one form of market-individualistic equity. However, we are not suggesting that school choice discourses has been conceptualized in similar ways across all Western nation states, or that Federal policies about school choice have been appropriated in similar ways, and with similar inequitable consequences at the level of the school district or school. Indeed, in Newark, New Jersey, USA some Charter schools, such as North Star Academy, established with funding made available under Federal School Choice policies have made substantial gains both in terms of redistributive and recognitive justice for African American and Latino students (see Sadnovik 2003).

2. Basil Bernstein (2000) uses the term arena and field interchangeably to refer to sites of struggle within the education bureaucracy. He differentiates between: (1) field of production – site for the production of official discourses/policies about education; (2) the field of recontextualization – curriculum departments, professional development units, university departments of education where official policies are recontextualized into pedagogic models, syllabus, units of work, textbooks etc for use in schools; (3) the field of re-production – schools, classrooms, school districts where curriculum units, guidelines etc are appropriated and re-contextualized in accord with the everyday logic of pedagogic work in these sites. (See also Singh 2002)

3. 'The habitus is a set of dispositions which generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are 'regular' without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any 'rule'. The dispositions which constitute the habitus are inculcated, structured, durable, generative and transposable' (Thompson 1992, p. 12).

4. To ensure confidentiality, each interview was labelled alphabetically. The location of the interviewee is indicated in the extracts as follows: SD (Strategic Directions, Performance and Review), C&A (Curriculum and Assessment) and W&PD (Workforce and Professional Development.)

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