

Conceptualising education policy as practice

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Abstract:

This paper makes an argument concerning the usefulness of a conception of policy as *practice* for theorizing and understanding all aspects of the education policy cycle. In contrast, education policy, while usually being thought of as produced in government, is most often seen to be implemented in *practice* in education institutions. This paper drawing on contemporary theorising of *practice*, especially but not exclusively Bourdieu's work on practice and its relationships with habitus, capital and field, argues for a perspective on policy as informed by and as *practice* and applies it across all elements of the policy cycle, that is agenda setting, text production and implementation. It is argued that a *practice* perspective captures well the economies of power, and of policy, and its various contexts. A conception of policy as *practice* across all of the policy cycle provides analytical resources to account for the dynamic nature of the movement of ideas and their resemiotisation, as they are pulled into and used in, and for, education policy.

Keywords: practice; policy cycle; Bourdieu; power

Introduction

Recently, education policy researchers have made use of both Bourdieu's ideas around *practice* (Lingard and Rawolle 2004; Rawolle 2005; Thomson 2005; Rawolle and Lingard 2008, Rawolle 2010; Taylor and Singh 2005; Blackmore 2010) and Fairclough's social *practice* grounded approach to critical discourse analysis (Taylor 2005; Adie 2008; Thomas 2008). This paper works with these and other *practice* derived theoretical perspectives¹ to offer ways to think about both the social logics of *practice* in particular policy settings *and* the movement of policy ideas to, in and between these settings. The movement of policy is conceptualised here in terms of transmission.

Education policy is especially suited to such an approach, because of the distinctive logics of *practice* where education policy is made, remade and enacted.

And yet we in education have allowed politicians to push us to act as if the most important goal of our work is to raise test scores. Never mind the development of the human beings in our charge- the integrity, the artistic expressiveness, the ingenuity, the persistence, or the kindness of those who will inherit the earth- the conversation in education has been reduced to a conversation about one number. (Delpit 2006, xiv)

Delpit is writing about the effects of the No Child Left Behind policy on the US educational topography. It is a salutary reminder of the power of politics to march with steel heels into the terrain of teachers and children and attempt to secure a flattened terrain. But in education there is always the possibility of resistance. As Delpit later notes 'On the other hand, I am filled with hope when I see schools like Hyde and others around the country that treat children with the belief that we are

working with precious resources when we seek to educate young people' (2006, xix). Teachers can remake policy as 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1980) and make education work beyond measurable performance in a test. Policy here can be seen as enactment through teacher *practice* rather than as simply policy implementation.

This paper seeks to explore ways to think about policy through the 'in-betweenness' inherent in conceptions of *practice*. A *practice* approach generates a research focus on what policy agents do and say (or write, video [for example Koh 2009], blog etc) and the conditions of that saying and doing. The relations are the focus, in my account, as this is where the economies of power play, and the opportunity for both resistances to and take up of policy ideas and their adherence in further policy derived work, is made. The approach taken here however does not signify a limit to the genesis of the ideas embodied in these policies, but works to understand the complex (that is, the interwoven composition) of simultaneous production of them, in the sense that global and local (that is framed through the nation state) understandings are rearticulated into policy and that they are continuously remade through their re-enactment in different government and institutional settings. *Practice* therefore provides a way of unpacking the multiple scalar interventions in and of policy ideas: where ideas with a global/ local circulation are realised and accounted for in *practice*.

The purpose of this paper therefore is to make a contribution to policy understandings by characterising aspects of the policy cycle in terms made available through thinking about *practice*. The concern is with keeping the analysis of policy alive to the possibilities of the ways in which power works in and through it. It begins by setting out a general overview of features of *practice* as the concept is used here. Then an underpinning argument regarding *practice* and its utility with respect to researching the complexity of policy is made. In the next section, a Bourdieusian characterisation of the logics of policy *practice* is proposed as a way of keeping power foregrounded and accessing the distinctiveness of policy contexts. Following that, other *practice* thinking tools, are proposed to add to the analysis of the logics of *practice*. The final section of the paper formulates theoretical perspectives that may be applied to policy production and transmission.

Features of *practice*

Possible worlds are always 'in' *practice* (Harvey 1996). (This is the case also with the *practice* of research, and a good reason for doing it.) As *practice* is never in a state of permanent completion, the world is constantly recreated and made possible in and through *practice*. A limitation (which is also an advantage) is that a *practice*- based approach cannot say anything at all about 'society'. The terms of its engagement are contemporaneously/ contiguously/ ambiguously at the level of the 'event' and at the level of the 'conditions', which allow for that event and which the event partly constitutes. In the abstraction to conditions, *practice* can account for these conditions in diverse and divergent times and places and looks to the interrelation between these conditions for explanation. This is useful when the conditions are increasingly, in the global north, in part constituted beyond the local (and nation-state) conditions of the event. A view from 'inside' *practice*, affords the possibility of specifying both its entangled elements and the 'contextual' conditions which it constitutes and it is constituted by.

Following Bourdieu, *practice* engenders thinking in a relational as opposed to substantialist way. This is not straightforward. Relational thinking requires access to tools which can cope with in-betweenness and becomingness, with dynamic and unfolding elements, but which can capture these for discussion and analysis. Notions such as ideology, hegemony, culture and discourse, which have been used to account for the fluidity and power differentials of social life, have lost some of their generative/ explanatory capacity as a result of multiple and often contradictory uses. While *practice* may be an 'open' signifier to the extent that it has had multiple uses, its application in policy research is still viable. Conceptions of *practice* efficaciously focus on what people do and say and can account for that doing and saying recognising the embeddedness, and constitution of power relations which may in turn be analysed through the concepts.

It will be argued here that the use of Bourdieu's theoretical triumvirate, habitus, field and capitals, *together* may strengthen their explanatory potential. An approach to policy interested in policy production and enactment (what is most often described as implementation) in different settings, may usefully describe the particular policy field, or habitus, but without the relating of the two through the capitals which are produced and sought in this relation in that particular policy space, important insights (particularly to do with the ways in which power operates) may not become as apparent. This is especially the case in education, where students will form part of the street level bureaucracy, when teachers exercise professional judgement to derive education relevant to a particular set of students from curriculum and other locally available resources.

Also, a dialectical approach to relational thinking and analysis is proposed and involves the 'relationship of form with content and of content with temporality i.e. becoming' (Lefebvre 1982, 58). Form and content are both crucial policy production and enactment parameters, but are static until they move through time and the contexts of people and the things they use to make and enact policy. The becomingness of policy creation, enactment and re-creation suggests that as ideas in policy circulate some of them adhere and some do not. In effect, they gain a temporary permanence. While this appears to be an oxymoron the idea of temporary permanence is used to convey the possibility of adherence though time which some ideas have. That is, they invoke the possibility of permanence, which of course is a fiction (see also Rawolle 2005 on education policy and temporary social fields); the objects of study, it is suggested here, are the mechanisms which keep this permanence in place and allow it to adhere and 'transmit' ideas with ease and efficacy. This variability of the social logics of policy *practice* and the adherence of the ideas in them is not benign. A dialectical relational approach conceptualises the different power relations and their effects through viewing *practice* as having elements which are in a constant and co-constitutive relation with one another. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) offer a 'way into' researching *practice* in this way. Their proposition (following Harvey 1996) sees *practice* both with 'internal' elements and in an external dialectical relation with other *practices*. None of the internal elements is reducible to the other and each is in part co-constituted in the *practice* by the other elements (Fairclough 2009); which may be, for example, people (for example policy makers and enactors) with beliefs, attitudes, values and their action and interaction; material objects; social relations such as previous relationships between and among politicians and bureaucrats and semiosis. Change in one element of the *practice* will produce change in the others. So to account for change,

analysis can be made of a particular element in terms of its relations with the other elements.

Policy is productive of the potential to change, where no change, and the continuum to radical change, is possible when policy is produced and enacted. The embedding of power relations, in *practice*, in each part of the policy cycle produces possibilities and constraints on the daily lives of policymakers and teachers and students alike. The next section of the paper begins to work further with the idea of thinking about policy in *practice* terms.

Policy and *practice*

This section draws on previous education policy work and makes a case for the application of *practice* across the policy cycle. Policy here is taken to be articulated beyond (but includes) the text of official policy documents, following Lingard and Ozga (2007), who outline an ecumenical approach to defining the concept of policy. This means that policy research is concerned with not only the actual policy documents, but also, for example, their conditions of constitution (why the policy was written in the first place; in response to what set of problems and how these problems were 'produced') to looking at the mediatisation of the policy and to the (potentially messy and uneven) enactment of the policy.

Policy is ... an 'economy of power', a set of technologies and *practices* which are realized and struggled over in local settings. Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete in so far as they relate to or map on to the 'wild profusion' of local *practice*. Policies are crude and simple. *Practice* is sophisticated, contingent, complex and unstable. (Ball 1994a,10)

Policy works as an economy of power in local settings; a vassal for values and the authority to allocate them (following the view that policy is the authoritative allocation of values [Easton 1953]). This does not mean that policy ideas necessarily originate in these local places (although they may). In a rescaled polity and in an increasingly globalised and globalising education policy field (Lingard 2009) policy ideas (and the values they embody) may form from a diversity of places (local, national, regional, global).

The most profoundly economic power though is the power which is executed without apparent investment in its exercise (Lukes 2004). It is the smooth power of the 'naturalised' and 'naturalising' world; the distinctions and classifications that hold the social world together in its unequal and enduringly distending ways. But smooth power always has a cost and the point is that the smoother, the more the cost is hidden (characterised as symbolic violence by Bourdieu and Wacquant [1992]). So a key question is: what are the economies of power in policy? Written another way- what are the values embodied in the policy and what are the mechanisms (technologies) which make those 'natural' and valorise those values economically (in the sense of with due and utmost expedience) and at what cost, to whom? *Practice* when used to conceptualise the enactment of power relations, it is argued, offers some useful tools to approach these key questions.

Realisation and struggle in local settings highlight the contingent and uneven uptake of policy. Policy is never 'implemented', only enacted where '[P]olicy as *practice* is 'created' in a trialectic of dominance, resistance and chaos/ freedom' (Ball 1994a, 11; italics and quotation marks in original). This trialectic works through the textual and action nature of policy. As Ball says, it is always what is written as well as what is done that makes policy and makes it incomplete and unfinished when the policy is enacted in *practice*.

Practice is sophisticated, contingent, complex and unstable. How best then to approach this sophistication and complexity? Suggested here is an approach which is unified by an overarching Bourdieusian framework through the notion of a socially derived logics of *practice*, but which also draws on multiple perspectives to enhance these conceptualisations of *practice* and the transmission of ideas through *practice*.

In my account, a *practice* orientation to policy is:

- sensitive to the complexity of and economies of power in different policy contexts (for example those of Influence/Text Production/ *Practice* [Bowe, Ball and Gold 1992]);
- works with the heterogeneity within and between these contexts (Taylor and Singh 2005 suggest sub-fields within a bureaucracy have distinct logics of *practice*); and
- able to consider the internal logics of policy *practices* (but also account for their immutable interconnectedness with other policy and non-policy *practices*). These internal logics are socially derived and may be analysed using conceptions of *practice* where the logic of *practice* "... defines what is and is not thinkable and what is doable..." (Grenfell 2008, 223).

In subsequent sections of the paper, a proposal based on exploring and accounting for these socially derived logics of *practice* is made. A *practice* approach can deal with complexity, keeps heterogeneity alive for analysis and provides ways to think about power and its manifestations. The next section outlines features of Bourdieu's approach to the logic of *practice* and how it may apply in different policy contexts.

Distinctive logics: Bourdieu

Bourdieu provides one set of 'thinking tools' for considering the social logics of *practice*. The first is social space where '... the notion of space contains, in itself, the principle of a relational understanding of the social world' (1998, 31). Habitus, field and capitals are 'Bourdieu's conceptual triad' for use in a relational analysis within this social space. This assumes a socially derived relational view of both logic and *practice* where the logic of *practice* is 'the product of a lasting exposure to conditions similar to those in which they [agents] are placed, they anticipate the necessity immanent in the way of the world' (Bourdieu 1990a, 11); so teachers anticipate the world in ways which politicians may never begin to (and vice-versa). This conceptualisation of the logic of *practice* is useful, as it places an agent into the world and with a relationship to the world that is pre-developed through exposure and predisposed to engagement in the future. Bourdieu suggests that the logic of *practice* is not a logic of the logistcian, but a socially (in)formed logic. Logic both forms through and within *practice* and constitutes the *practice* itself in an ongoing, but not determining way through, habitus, fields and capitals. These three concepts, central to Bourdieu's approach are outlined briefly below.

Habitus includes embodied durable dispositions which are inculcated within the social agent by exposure to social conditions. These social conditions are both produced by the agent and reproduced by the agent. In this dual action of production and reproduction the agent is able to transcend the conditions of habitus to the extent that the habitus is pre-structured to the conditions it will meet. Habitus also applies as a concept to both individual social agents and to groups of social agents with dispositions, which are similarly inculcated (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). So a teacher habitus will produce and be produced by teaching (and its social conditions). A policy actor habitus will likewise structure policy structures at the same time as being structured by them. These distinctive inculcated dispositions play an important part in the formation of the social logics of different policy contexts.

The concept of habitus has been criticised for being too 'pre-conscious' (Crossley 2001). It cannot account for the rational actor, even when rationality is temporally, spatially- contextually bound. This reading of habitus may occur when the concept is removed from its theoretical partners- fields and capital; a reductive theoretical action which is like trying to understand why a plane flies by only looking at the wings. Bourdieu (1990b) however does suggest that habitus does not account for all embodied action. There is the possibility of reflexivity, which may lead to a social agent understanding their location within the social milieu, which is constituted in their body and its very social functioning. The difficulty with the concept of habitus is the ways in which data may be derived by a researcher that can adequately be explained in its terms. Therefore researchers have concentrated on what can be seen and what agents can talk about, which assumes a two way rationality- that of the researcher and that of the social agent being researched. Habitus denies both these possibilities and one is left with an intractable and un-researchable concept. Field and habitus are two sides of the same coin and capital is the 'medium of communication between them' (Grenfell 2010, 89). Contemporaneous focus on the three concepts provides access to the relations between them and a powerful set of explanatory ideas. Use of Bourdieu's terms then demands an approach to research which is situated (Suchman 2007), temporary and thickly descriptive. Situated suggests a need to account for the social historical geography (or geographical history) (Harvey 2007), from a research perspective, fixing the time and place, but accounting for the social construction of each.

A field is a network or configuration of relations between positions both present and potential, situated in the structure of the distribution of power (and capitals) and relations to other positions, which can be either dominant or dominated. Each field generates belief in its own value (Bourdieu in Wacquant, 1989:39). As McNay (2004, 184) notes, '[A]ctors occupy positions within social fields that are determined both by the distribution of resources within a given field and also by the structural relations between that field and others'. Also as Thomson suggests '[T]he task of social scientists seeking to understand the social world, challenged by and following Bourdieu, is to understand the nature of fields, their rules, narratives and self-held truths' (2005, 742). The embedded or overarching fields of power and gender (Lingard 2009) contribute to the social logics of the *practices* which the habitus and the fields generate. The positions which teachers and students and politicians and bureaucrats hold and the articulations of those positions with respect to the embeddings of power, and its manifestations through gender, are important to considerations of policy. For example the Minister of Education holds a position with

respect to the field of education which is very different to a teacher in terms of the power relations (made active through the possession of field-produced and enacted capitals), which accrue to the positions and the distribution of its effects. The politician for example, may generate policy for thousands of schools; the teacher may remake policy for 30 students. The teacher's power will be mediated through that of the politician, but the converse would rarely be the case.

Also generated are the capitals (economic, cultural and social [Bourdieu 1986]), the extent of their convertibility, and the convertibility of other capitals within the matrix of intersecting fields in question. In this way, relationality is highlighted. Each of the concepts (capitals, fields and habitus) generates change in the other as they change and this change does not stop. This is a way of 'thinking dialectically' as per Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999). There is no sense that a field is ever complete or that habitus is ever fully 'developed', or that capitals are defined and unchanging. The strength of Bourdieu's terms, and their importance for policy is that they allow power to be theorised and accounted for empirically through the dialectical conceptual triad of habitus, field and capitals. The positions that the field, the habitus and the capitals make available are held in place by these power relations. And these power relations define the forms and relative values of the capitals that the field-habitus relation produces. Different policy contexts have different social logics of *practice*, which are logics derived through power and the ways in which power is made material in the capital in its forms and distributed volumes (possessed unequally by various social agents). And as Thomson suggests

The suggestion here then is that there are differing logics of *practice* inherent in different policy sites (Taylor and Singh 2005; Lingard, Rawolle and Taylor 2005; Lingard, Hayes, Mills and Christie 2003). This means that policy which is 'made' in one place and time will have an interest in the policymaking processes of that particular place with variable insights about the ways in which the people who will put the policy into *practice* actually carry out their work. Lingard et al. (2003, 14) suggest that

... following Bourdieu, that education policy producers within the state and educational practitioners in schools are located in different subfields within education and are positioned in relation to overlapping fields such as the political one, in different ways, then the almost inevitable morphing of policy intentions to mutant policy *practices* in schools is understandable.

Certain fields then have a logic which is specific and 'in' them. Two issues arise. First, that fields are inevitably intertwined and overlap (see Lingard and Rawolle 2004 regarding cross field effects and Lingard et al. 2003 on interplay of fields). This means that there will always be logics, which may be specific to a field, but which will always have logics from other fields informing that logic (Lingard et al. 2003 note the embeddedness of the fields of power and gender and the economy to the field of education). Second, that in the relation between habitus and field and capital, *practice* and its logics are implicated in multiple and intricate ways. *Practice* can play a role in different policy sites through the theoretical prisms afforded by field, capital, and habitus. And yet habitus, capital and field when understood relationally *are practice*. So *practice* is the elements combined and also the logic of *practice* is in the field(s). The ways in which the relations between each of the theoretical elements can be understood to work together to *be practice* and the logic of this *practice* is

both part of the interplay between fields and the interplay between the habitus, the fields and the capitals and the strategies of agents, which are recognised within the field and therefore crucially, as suggested above, the way power is able to both accrue and is distributed amongst these agents.

Bourdieu's conceptual resources when applied to the distinctive social logics of policy produce certain gains. These especially are that the conterminous nature of scales (that is the local/global) can be accounted for through the notion of fields. Secondly that habitus puts people into the analysis but not on the basis of their individual actions, rather through these actions socially derived bases. This allows an account of the homologous relation with similarly inculcated social agents. Importantly rationality is denied as a freewheeling conceptual category tied to individual people, but still allows the regularity of practice and the rationality specific to it to be considered. Thirdly, capitals signify the valued and their valuations in specific contexts. So taken together the possibility of accounting for different policy logics using these concepts is not bound to a place, or to particular individuals, but to social logics across places and individuals, but still with a degree of specificity which may account for the distinctiveness of what happens in policy sites such as governments, the media and education institutions.

The next section of the paper reviews other approaches to practice which produce other gains.

Distinctive Logics, Production and Transmission

Bourdieu argued for and developed specific uses of language (e.g. field, habitus, capital) to overcome the exclusive focus on either the social agent or the structural conditions of *practice* of previous sociological theory and research. That is, his approach is proffered as an alternative to the structure agency dualism. Bourdieu based his theoretical conceptions on empirical work. Derived from empirical research concerned with *practice* in organisations, Nicolini, Gherardi and Yanow (2003:8) likewise suggest that "[P]ractice is both our production of the world and the result of this process. It is always the product of specific historical conditions resulting from previous *practice* and transformed into present *practice*". The transformational (and temporal) aspect of *practice* becomes the focus.

Transformation is captured in '*practice*' as always 'becoming' (to different extents depending on the *practice*) (Bjørkeng, Clegg and Pitsis 2009). It is never in a state of completion and is neither directly comprehensible through observation (an implication for the research methods here), nor static.

Bjørkeng et al. (2009) conducted a five year empirical study and suggest that *practice* theories have general characteristics in common. These are that:

1. *Practices* are 'embodied arrays of activities' based on shared understanding and competence;
2. Materiality is intersubjectively understood and configured in specific ways in specific *practices*;
3. *Practice* defines its own rationality; rationality does not exist as external to *practice*;
4. Particular *practices* must be the focus as *practice* is everything and nothing at the same time – *practice* is the nexus of human interconnectivity; and

5. “Social order ... is to be found in the field of *practices*- both established by it and establishing it. *Practices* are recursive; through the sense that they deploy they shape the sense of that which is in order and that which is not” (Bjørkeng et al. 2009, 146).

Bjørkeng et al. in the presentation of findings of the study of *practice* as ‘becoming’ suggest that in order to conceptualise *practice* in terms of its ‘unfolding’ three features need to be identified. These are ‘authoring boundaries’ (‘processes by which activities are constructed as legitimate part of practising (or not’) (149), ‘negotiating competencies’ (‘processes by which practising, and practitioners, are constructed as competent’) (149) and ‘adapting materiality’ (‘the processes by which material configurations are enacted and entangled in practising and constructed as essential elements of (a) *practice*’) (149). These are important findings as one of the issues identified by Warde (2005) is that the formation of new *practices* and the relationships between *practices* are not well documented or understood.

To summarise the argument thus far, an approach to policy *practice* based on habitus, field and capital (Bourdieu) allows a focus away from the binary of actor/structure and can account for relations of power and the ways which it plays out distinctively in different policy contexts. Importantly, it is suggested here, that the relations between the dispositions, which can account for “unconscious’ rather than strategic’ (Lingard, Rawolle and Taylor 2005, 764) actions of policy agents, the capitals derived and recognised through the logics of *practice* and the interacting fields in each policy context are researched together. Findings from organisation studies especially Bjørkeng et al’s conception of *practice* as always ‘becoming’, especially constituting competence, shifting boundaries and adapting materiality help to introduce ways to account for movement in terms of changing *practice* and bring into focus other aspects of *practice* for analysis.

Practice also however involves both saying (and writing) and doing; and both produce meaning. Meaning is established through and in *practice* and is subject to the power relations of *practice* in its production. A multimodal point of view may be particularly relevant to policy study now, as increasingly policies are promulgated via video (see Koh 2009 for work on video policy), websites and glossy brochure-like documents. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) argue for a conception of multimodality that encompasses content (discourses and design) and expression (production and distribution). Discourses are “socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of) reality” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001, 4); design involves uses of semiotic resources to make discourses realisable; production is the actual bringing together of the (selected) discourses and design into a form which may be interpreted; and distribution concerns the replication and dissemination of the production.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) argue that these are four strata of communication that articulate a meaning, which may in turn be interpreted through the four strata. So for example when a person speaks, the listener brings a set of discourse, design, production and distribution elements to the interpretation so that communication is both articulation and interpretation. They argue also that each of the four strata adds meaning both in articulation and interpretation. Production therefore is one of the strata of a theoretical conception of both the articulation and interpretation of meaning. And this meaning is produced in *practice*. Therefore the historical sum of the conditions of possibility allows for the production of an artefact that has a

meaning potential (not a read-off-able meaning). This artefact (for example a public policy document, or policy speech, or policy directive, or informal negotiation between a policy public servant and an education 'provider) is positioned in relation both to the conditions and embodiment of its production, but also to the conditions and embodiment of its interpretation. As Bourdieu (1999, 221) notes, '[T]he fact that texts circulate without their context ... they don't bring with them the field of production ... the fact that recipients ... re-interpret the texts ... generate some formidable misunderstandings and that can have good or bad consequences'. How policy means is never a function of its production alone, it is always in the constant nexus of a new production through interpretation in *practice*. And to refer back to the dialectical relational approach to social *practice* proposed by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), the meaning aspect of *practice* is in a constant and co-constitutive relation with the people who produce it (with their beliefs, values, social relations), and the materiality of the production (with respect to policy for example the extent of the resources invested in the policy, the ways the policy confines relations between teachers and students in terms of resources and space and class size- teacher ratio for example).

So meaning is produced in *practice* and partly constitutes *practice*. However, policy moves from place to place, from person to person and from organisation to organisation through time, across the policy cycle, through different logics of *practice*. Some ideas in this movement disappear altogether, some may reappear in a different space and/or time (for example as shown in travelling or vernacular global policy) and some of them adhere through time. 'Adhere' here, means to remain current and in use as 'dominant' ideas. For example, in Vocational Education and Training (VET) Institutions in Australia 'quality' is 'managed' via a system of audits through the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF). In the case of the AQTF, ideas about the management of quality are informed by accounting and quality assurance principles. These are then recontextualised within the field of VET through the AQTF.

Debray (2000) developed the notion of transmission to account for the ways in which ideas are carried through time². Two ways which Debray proposes for thinking about the materiality of this transmission of ideas are provided through the concepts of organised materiality (OM) and materialised organisation (MO). With respect to education, for example, textbooks may be seen as OM and institutions as MO. So in textbooks, knowledge is organised through a technology (the book as a printed object) that allows for its possible transmission in pedagogical places, and times. Institutions on the other hand as materialised organisations are structured in ways that are the result of ideas about education and its place in society. VET institutions, for example, were created in Australia to 'train' apprentices in order to contribute to national skills development. As MO they provided an important function to society and will continue to, as long as the productive cost is within the ambit that the 'society' is willing to pay. Equally, text books provide a way of delimiting knowledge and pedagogising it so that 'dominant' forms of knowledge are reproducible through time. This suits those with the power and influence to 'produce' and delimit what counts as knowledge in a particular discipline at a particular time, and who also are able to control the means of that 'production'. The organised materiality of policy has the potential to reorder the materialised organisation of education institutions. This is perhaps best exemplified in the text-book and testing controlled character of US primary schooling.

As part of the movement across the policy cycle, policy ideas may be 'resemiotised' (Iedema 2003) between contexts and within the distinct logics of *practice* in different policy settings. Resemiotisation involves the changing meaning potential that is derived through time and changing conditions of materiality and production. The concepts of transmission and resemiotisation offer tools to analyse and think about ideas in policy as they are rearticulated through time and space, but neither assume a temporal or spatial linearity. There is no lock step 'production', but one which incorporates dispersed geneses and scattered products. Transmission offers a way to approach the adherence of some ideas and the loss of others (Lemke 2000), as meaning potential is remade through time and space (resemiotisation) and may account for the 'manufacture of consent' through 'investment' in the materiality of the meaning (Iedema 2003), or work in the opposite direction in contexts of professional logics where policy is 'unmade'. An analysis then is possible of the links of effects that different logics of *practice* may have on transmission as the policy moves between policy sites.

The point, with respect to education policy studies, is that policy problems and solutions form from disparate idea sources and from their site(s) of production are mediated in the transmission to their sites of enactment (these sites may or may not be the ones or constituted in the particular ways), which the policy problem/ solution nexus foresaw. In the processes of transmission, the ideas in the policy nexus are differentially taken up in different places and times. While the concepts of organised materiality and materialised organisation can usefully be utilised to characterise these policy processes and their effects, Debray (2000) also suggests that the 'armature' required for transmission is greater when ideas are less mainstream (dominant), therefore the resource investment in transmission is greater when ideas are emergent (Williams 1977), if they are to be transmitted. And as Miller (2005, 20) argues '[P]eople in institutions such as bureaucracy appear mostly as the product of the sheer density and authority constituted by institutionalised materiality' so that 'it is at this institutional level that the general point becomes remarkably clear: that power is, among other things, a property of materiality'. Power, it is argued here then, is materialised in organisations through the organisation of materiality, in *practice*, in and across distinct policy sites.

Conclusions

It is suggested here that policy at all stages of the cycle can be conceptualised and analysed in terms of practice. The relations in and between policy derivation and enactment, can be thought of in terms of the distinct logics of different contexts and the movement of policy ideas through transmission and resemiotisation. A dialectical relational approach to the distinct logics offers a way to think about policy practice in its complexity and its economising of power. Analysis of the complexity of these logics is made through complementary theoretical concepts which share as a commonality an interest in *practice*. Each of them denies any primacy to either individual accounts of policy practice or totalising conceptions of power or social order made through analysis of policy. Rather, the intent is to work with individual policy makers and enactors and the artefacts which they produce and work to consider the logics of their practice and their use in, and in making, their particularly policy contexts. This does not deny the usefulness of research that focuses on different aspects of practice individually (for example a focus on semiosis or habitus or field), and methodologically this may be necessary, but the argument here is that a

practice orientation can broaden the focus on the relations which make up *practice*. These may then tell us something about the materialities made through the economies of power in policy.

Questions remain about the ways in which to approach the production of research methods and data using the practice approach outlined here. However a theorisation of research as practice using the same resources may provide a way to orient the approach. As Thomson suggests '... we must consider how the practice of social science is implicated in the production of its own and other fields' (2005, 742). Also, the combination of Chouliaraki and Fairclough's dialectical relational account of social practice, and Kress and van Leeuwen's approach to thinking about meaning potential in practice, offer powerful tools for analysis of semiotic artefacts (and the other related and co-constituted elements of practice), which should include accounts of policy agents, policy documents and other documents related to policy (for example curriculum documents, school policies and so on).

Bourdieu's ideas have been used in a quite defined and defining way; suggesting especially that habitus, fields and capitals are used together for conceptual/ analytical gain. Notions of the game, *illusio* and strategy may add further to analysis. The main point here, however, is to try to maintain the relational aspects of his three main thinking tools in order to provide a resource for thinking about policy and its power economies in practice in specific contexts. Power is easily overlooked in policy analysis and yet remains the key to understandings its disparate effects, with outcomes for teachers and students that are not benign.

The disjunction between what people in government and bureaucracy do and what people in education institutions do in relation to policy, and why, motivates the argument here. Policy, whatever its purpose and outcomes, takes a mix of ideas and moves them. The production of the ideas into materiality through action and words, at each stage of the policy cycle is made through practice within entangled and immutable power relations. Importantly *practice* is 'open' in that there may be opportunities for change and transformation- possible worlds are always created in *practice*. The task is to look for and enumerate the elements of *practices* and 'their incompleteness, their contradictoriness, their gaps, i.e., the properties which keep systems open and make them amenable to transformative action' (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 65); to work productively within the lacunae of policy.

Notes

1. Bourdieu's ideas are used as the basis for or as a counterpoint to each of these other perspectives.
2. Debray is interested in much broader cultural transmission, especially across millennia, but the concepts are nonetheless useful here for orienting thinking about the ways materiality is part of the adherence (or not) of ideas in policy through time.

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