

Chapter 2

Perceptions of Policy

Conceptualisations of policy vary across the field of education policy research, and sometimes even within a particular study (Ozga 1990). While understandings of policy have certainly developed and expanded over time, this is not to declare that there is a unified view on what policy 'is'. Older ideas are not automatically supplanted by newer concepts as they emerge. Rather, a range of older and newer definitions are at work in contemporary education research concomitantly, and are being added to and debated as policy theory evolves. Four key themes in these constructions of policy are briefly outlined and critiqued below: policy as text, policy as values-laden actions, policy as process and policy as discursive. The value of each (particularly the latter conception) is then expanded upon for orientation-based analysis of policies in education policy research.

2.1 Policy as Text

Both in professional literature and everyday talk, policy is often characterised as *a set of laws or guidelines within a 'governing text'* (Callewaert 2006, p. 767). Young (2007) calls this the traditional approach in education policy research, but it can also be evident within some contemporary research-based 'calls' for policy or content analysis of policy texts, which can be built on simplistic models of policy as constituting a textual 'policy document' or an official spoken requirement (verbal text) on expected behaviours. These models, without always declaring an explicit correlation, can carry the assumption that policy directly determines practices (perhaps with variable successes dependent on the policy's wording (Callewaert 2006). At most, 'Technical-empiricist' models of policy analysis evaluate policy as communication between policy makers and practitioners, considering whether or not policy makers' intentions within the text were 'understood' and implemented (Alexander 1997, p. 3; Olssen et al. 2004, pp. 60–61).

It would be foolish to deny that texts (and the policy makers' intentions) are an important *aspect* of policy. Policy advocates can decry their absence or denounce their presence, department heads and principals can announce them in stakeholder gatherings, students can look them up and quote them to negotiate an issue, staff can be hired and fired by their adherence to them and so forth. Yet policy texts

can also be all but ignored. They can be buried in the depths of thick manuals or hidden at the end of infinitely diverting clicks on hyperlinked webpages. They can be coupled with utterly no funding, resources or guidance. On the other hand, they can feature as centrepieces to expensive and sensational political campaigns. They can be resisted at rallies peopled with union members, parents and outraged community members. The words they use can be interpreted in multiple ways such that they support divergent intentions and practices. Policy texts may not even reflect policy makers' intentions to begin with, and these intentions may be conflicting or unknown to the policy makers, and are unlikely to have purely 'originated' within these individuals in a de-contextualised manner.

Levinson, Sutton and Winstead decry the lack of social theory in education policy research using this construction of policy:

Virtually all research in the traditional paradigm is applied, evaluative, and problem oriented, within a technocratic liberal democratic ethos. It is directed toward addressing or modifying the policy in question, perhaps toward documenting its unintended consequences. Rarely does such policy research more openly address the assumptions and interests that go into policy formation itself, or question the nature of policy as a social practice of power under late modernity (Callewaert 2006, pp. 768–769).

The lack of interest in social practices of power is an issue with this model for research interested in power dynamics regulating dominant trends and uses of education. Another problem with application of this model is that the subjects of the policy (particularly students, but also parents, teachers and other stakeholders) are only visible in this model as they are mentioned and considered within the text. Thus, student subjection within stakeholder interpretations, their experiences of practices and their own navigations of the field are denied in a manner that is unhelpful for a study interested in student subjectivity (for example). Thus, these models have a very limited usefulness.

Keywords

Policy document, policy text
Governing text
Policy-makers' intentions
Technical-empiricist analysis

Tutorial and Field Activities

1. What are three education policy areas you are interested in?
2. Pick one area to focus on. Is there any international policy document on this topic provided by bodies like UNESCO or Education International?

3. Is there a distinct national education policy document for this topic? If so, how can it be accessed, and by whom? Was there an official launch or campaign promoting it in the media or to schools?
4. Is there a distinct state or district education policy document for this topic? If so, how can it be accessed, and by whom? Was there an official launch or campaign promoting it in the media or to schools?
5. Are there any independent education policy documents (for religious or alternative education systems)? If so, how can they be accessed, and by whom? Was there an official launch?
6. Is there any guidance related to this issue delivered within the text of other policy documents on broader themes?
7. Can you find examples of individual schools that have policy documents or policy text covering the topic? Is the policy available online, or in school diaries, or only to staff?
8. If there are no policy documents or policy texts for your topic, are there other ways in which guidance on this issue is communicated?
9. If there are several policy documents or text parts, is there a hierarchy in how do they relate to each-other? Is there a governing text or law? Are there exemptions?
10. Who are the main (or potential) 'policy makers' for this topic area?
11. Would you say they give clear guidance in this policy area?
12. Is it possible in looking at their policy documents, texts or other provisions to have different interpretations of the policy-makers' intentions about how this area should be dealt with?

2.2 Policy as Values-Laden Actions

As early as the 1960s, there has been a view of policy that went beyond the 'policy as text' model to construct it as *actions that assign value ideals* (Easton 1965). This view is not unlike some more contemporary claims that policy describes an organisation's 'stance' on matters and the series of actions to be taken (Harman 1984) or '... aims or goals (statements on) what ought to happen' (Blakemore 2003, p. 10). In the 1970s Kogan recognised policy as the pursuit of fundamentally political objectives. In an educational policy making study wherein he refers to policies as the 'operational statements of values' or the 'authoritative allocation of values' (Kogan 1975, p. 55), he locates education policy within the realm of values and politics, and this frame has been drawn on in much subsequent education policy research (Giroux 1993; Irvine 2002; Luke and Luke 1995; McLaren 1992; Snook 2000). This also places policy in a context of wider fundamental questions about what and whom education is for, and who decides. In this sense, Kogan's version of policy is not completely divorced from the context of its creation, but rather includes and reflects this context.

There is logic in the idea that policy (at least in part) reflects or is part of its context. Yet rapid economic and social change have affected the policy making context since Kogan published this work, and when policy is considered in terms of values within contemporary education research now there must be a recognition that those values are continually being contested, ‘with ensuing conflicts ebbing and flowing’ (Bell and Stevenson 2006, p. 17). Indeed, all of these ‘values-laden actions’ models are problematic in that they focus on the intended outcomes or politically ideal interpretations of policy. Jennings’ model (Fig. 2.1 below) reveals the sequential logic of this perspective on policy (Jennings 1977). Policy is seen as initiated in response to a specific issue, opinions are gathered and leaders emerge. This overlooks how ‘problems’ may not even be perceptible due to the bias of community and leadership or alternative possibilities on how policy may be initiated. The model then suggests alternatives are formally presented and then discussed, and the final policy is made and implemented. So there is some acknowledgment of negotiation of power and some room for minor conflict. However, as Scott (1998) argues, no degree of planning in policy generally can eliminate contingency, and planners must adopt plans slowly and react to human agency and local responses rather than repeatedly seeking to enforce envisioned outcomes. High modernist impositions with the most utopic of visions can debilitate the institutions that they sought to support, and sometimes the weaknesses of quite idealistic and hopeful leadership are only overcome by individuals who, ironically, ‘break the rules’ for survival.

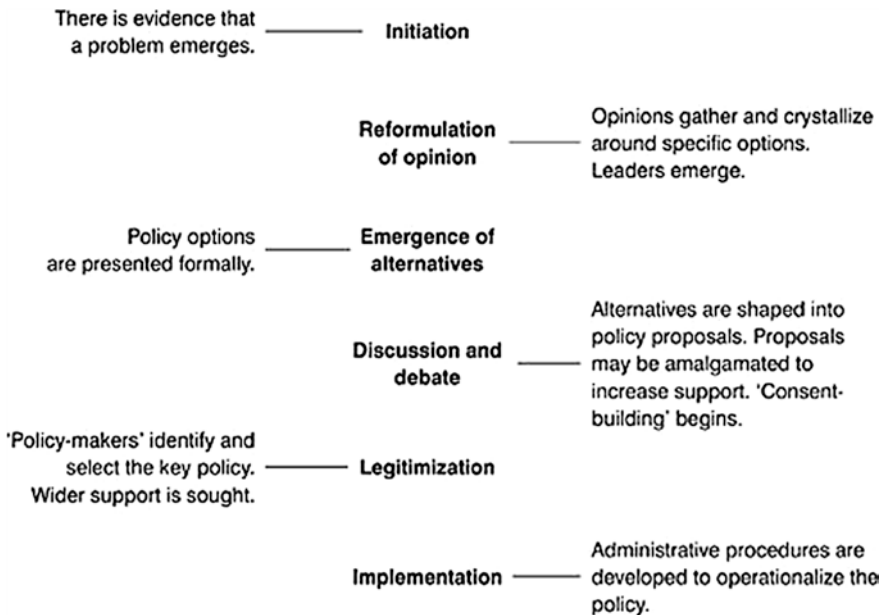


Fig. 2.1 Jennings’ (1977) linear model of policy overlooks interpretation processes

In ignoring the *processes* of policy (such as interpretation and implementation issues) and the ways in which these can be part of what forms and re-forms policy, these models do not explore the ‘whole picture’ of policy. They also overlook the ways in which the values within the policies can be critiqued, refined and even resisted. This means that policy analysis using this construction of policy can overlook how the policy is actually experienced by stakeholders. The Jennings (1977) model in particular shows how it is the role of leaders that could be analysed most easily in this framing, and that those whose values are not represented or who are subject to policy (such as students and school community members) are less ‘visible’ in this conceptualisation. This invisibility renders such models less valuable for studies with a critical or post-structural interest in such school community members’ interests, but may have some value for studies with an interest in administrators and leaders.

Keywords

Values-ideals

Stance

Values-laden actions

Context

Tutorial and Field Activities

1. Choose one education policy document, text segment, statement or artefact.
2. What sorts of concepts are valued in this text (including any imagery)?
3. What is the policy’s ‘stance’ on the topic area it deals with?
4. What are the contexts, or situations, it refers to?
5. What does it suggest ‘should happen’, when and why?
6. What actions does it promote, discourage or ban?
7. What are the values or beliefs suggested in the way it promotes or bans an action?
8. Whose values are represented in this approach?
9. Whose values are not represented in this approach?
10. If you have access to one or two people in the relevant field (perhaps you know a teacher, an administrator, a student or perhaps you could consider your own experience) ask them if what the policy position says ‘should happen’, **does** happen in their experience?

2.3 Policy as Process

Since the 1980s, there has been a sense in education research that policy is *process-based* and it is indeed problematic to define policy in a manner that de-contextualises its processes (Prunty 1984). Policy may further be conceived as a succession or cycle of decisions (Ham and Hill 1984), or a continuous cycle where it is made, re-made during implementation and repeatedly revised (Bowe et al. 1992). It may equally be defined as including the provision and allotment of resources (Codd 1988). There is certainly value in this conceptual development; policy directives and ideals can be more or less likely to ‘succeed’ or be interpreted in varying ways dependant on the processes by which policy comes into being, is funded, resourced, serviced, tested and policed. Within the 1990s the view that policy may indeed be seen as a process in itself became more widespread, and was particularly popularised by policy theorists such as Stephen J. Ball (Ball 1993; Bell and Stevenson 2006; Fulcher 1989; Kenway 1990; Lingard 1993). This modelling of policy can be seen in research exploring how local actors and dynamics within implementation affect education policy outcomes (Alexander 1997; Sabatier 1986) and research considering ‘failed’ implementation using backward mapping approaches (Allen 2007; Angelides 2008).

Such research can acknowledge unanticipated policy impacts through localised institutional effects (Alexander 1997; APA Task Force 2009; Raab 1994) and use interpretive approaches based on sociology (symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology), literary criticism (hermeneutics), cultural anthropology and cognitive or social psychologies. This construction occupies ‘a kind of middle ground between traditional and critical approaches’ broaching the, broader question of what ‘does’, albeit to make policy more effective at achieving its aim (Levinson et al. 2009, pp. 772–773). Spillane, Reiser and Reimer’s integrative sociocultural model particularly applies situated cognition to emphasise the interpretive processes in which implementing agents are involved (Alexander 1997), and they argue that the idea that such agents’ alternative interpretations are necessarily ‘mistaken’ or ‘wilful efforts’ of sabotage is simplistic (p. 393). Their model includes three core elements: the policy signals, the individual implementing agent and the situation in which sense making occurs (p.392). It focuses on how the implementing agent (principals, staff) constructs meaning as informed by their personal set of prior knowledge and beliefs, with some acknowledgement of the institution’s effects on this. This acknowledges practice as an ongoing process of policies. However, this model has faced critique for accepting the conventional distinction between policy makers and policy implementers (Levinson et al. 2009), where sometimes individuals can fulfil both roles. Another issue is that the focus on individuals overlooks broader social power dynamics and the cultural influences *shaping* individual interpretation.

Additionally, it must be noted that there is no set, predictable or ‘natural’ cycle followed in the case of all policies. For all the discussion of policies as being developed and revised over time in these models, policies can actually be unannounced,

undistributed, resource-less clauses in hidden manuals. Policies can be abandoned completely with a change of leadership. Or, they can be unspoken but generally adhered to because they are (unofficially) part of hegemonic social cultures imperceptible from ‘the inside’ (a particular time/place). Alternately, taking a new ideological perspective can mean certain policies may even be analysed as being ‘as yet unconceived’. So looking at processes alone can only make visible what has happened and is conceivable in a particular world-view and model of processes, leaving out other possibilities. This means discussion of ‘what is not’ and depths of analysis of ‘what is’ in terms of the policy is limited. Research located within the post-modern perspective—wherein researcher curiosity about ‘what is not’ and ‘what may be’ can be essential for gaining distance from and analysing current truths—may find such models of policy less useful.

Keywords

Policy processes
Policy cycle
Implementation
Mistaken interpretation
Wilful resistance or sabotage

Tutorial and Field Activities

1. Choose one education policy topic area.
2. Historically, have there ever been different policy documents/texts to what is available now in this policy area?
3. Would you say this policy area has been regularly updated, sporadically updated, or sometimes abandoned/replaced entirely?
4. For current approaches to this policy area, what implementation is required?
5. How is this monitored (if at all)?
6. Is implementation ever officially evaluated or reported on? How?
7. In what ways could this policy area be accidentally misunderstood? Have there been reports of education stakeholders or staff misunderstanding or overlooking the policy?
8. In what ways could this policy be intentionally resisted? Have there been reports of people speaking out against the policy or resisting its requirements?

2.4 Policy as Discursive

Alongside the three other conceptualisations, there is also theoretical work that understands policy as *mobilising specific ‘discourses’ within or across its various texts and processes* (Ball and Exley 2010; Fairclough 1993; Rogers et al. 2005). These discourses necessarily relate to, and affect, policy contexts. Theorists who view policy as discursive trace the language of texts back to its source in spoken language of social life, and this materialist theory of discourse—stemming from psychoanalysts, Michel Foucault, Mikhail m. Bakhtin, black aestheticians, New Historicists, cultural materialists, cultural studies theorists, post-structuralist feminists and queer theorists—insists that language is uttered by ‘embodied subjects situated historically in contentious social spheres regulated by powerful institutions’ (Leitch et al. 2001, p. 6). This approach to the policy as social text, wherein language use is dialogical,¹ sees policy as representing and refracting reality (as reality is grounded in conventions of social phenomena, not in nature). Indeed, language constitutes reality, and also (re)produces distortions. Thus discursive policy is in a sense a scripted mixing and matching of cultural codes derived from (and deriving) the schooling context, community, traditions and practices.

In order to better understand this latter construction of policy, it is necessary to define discourse. The term ‘discourse’ originates from the Latin *discursus*—‘to run to and fro’ (Rogers et al. 2005). Yet the meaning of the word has changed significantly over time, such that it is difficult to delineate (Mills 1997). Even Foucault, in carrying out what is widely recognised as seminal work on the character of discourse, never limited his compositions to one conceptualisation of the term, arguing:

Instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word ‘discourse’, I believe I have added to its meanings: treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualisable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements (Foucault 1972, p. 80).

Fairclough (1989) extends Foucault’s model to create a distinct understanding of discourse as ‘social practice’, determined by ‘sets of conventions associated with social institutions’ (p.17). Like Foucault and socio-linguistics generally, Fairclough (1989) rejects the Saussurean view of language as divided into the pre-existing system of codes (*langue*) and an individuals’ chosen use of it (*parole*). He argues that language-use (and all language-based constructs such as conversations and policies), is discursive as their variation is not uniquely determined by an individual, but socially determined by variables such as the social identities of people interacting, their socially defined roles and social settings (Fairclough 1989, p. 17). The key

¹ Informs and is informed by previous language and textual usage rather than maintains prescriptive meaning, as in Bakhtin’s and subsequent literary and language theorists’ use of the word (Apple 1990).

elements of Fairclough's model are shared with other theorists interested in critical discourse analysis (Gee 1990; Rogers et al. 2005; Wodak 1996): that discourse does ideological work, constitutes society and culture, is situated and historical, and relates to/mediates power. For example, Gilbert argues discourse sees language not simply as logically structured meaning systems, but as a social practice in which people 'enter into relations with each other as they engage in the process of producing and interpreting meaning' (Gilbert 1992, p. 58). This highlights the importance of interpretation processes and human interactions within any construction of policy as discursive.

Consequently, education policy discourses are not only 'found' by researchers using these models within policy texts or within schools, but across sites as varied as the field of education research and academic conferences, teacher interpretations, within media reports, in casual discussions between parents, at anti-racism rallies and so on. Luke and Luke highlight the complexity of such discourses:

Educational discourse thus can be seen as a system of signs and representations that traverse laterally through a synchronic grid: from the academic article to the policy document and curriculum specifications, from the folk wisdom of the staffroom to the principal's speech at the school assembly, and from the classroom text to student small group and lesson talk (Luke and Luke 1995, p. 364).

One could add that it goes around and back and 'to and fro' again, as discourse is wont to do in the Latin understanding. Discursive models can allow room for examination of the 'roles', 'identities' or subject positions offered for students in education policies, practices, interpretations and their own field navigations. The interest in discourse function in some models also potentially allows for exploration of the use and usefulness of policies and policy position constructions, without conflating these directly with 'reality/practice' in a simplistic fashion. Indeed, complexities in the relationship between policy text, interpretation and practices are inherent in some models. For these reasons, a discursive model of policy can be particularly useful and appropriate to research with key preoccupations around students, multiple stakeholders, subjectivity and power.

However, not all models were considered equally useful for such research. Most commonly, education researchers who explicate their model tend to apply either the work of Gee or some combination of theorists such as Foucault and Fairclough (Rogers et al. 2005). Gee (1990, 1999) distinguishes between ('upper case D') Discourses—cultural language components, ('lower case d') discourse—the linguistic elements used to connect them. Both components work together to maintain construct interactions, yet are saturated by power relations with histories of participation. Gee's model uses an essentially critical framing and asserts that while all discourses are ideological and social, some are valued more than others, and is in this sense well suited to critical analysis based on Marxist, radical feminist, postcolonial and such grounds. However, Gee's framing is not entirely compatible with the post-modern frame of some education research in that it is less congruent with an analysis of power beyond the 'repressive/repressed' model. A model of discourse that allows room for a more complex theory of power and discursive functioning is required in such research.

A particular model of 'discourse' increasingly used in education research that fits these needs mostly draws on the work of two theorists: Michel Foucault and Norman Fairclough (according to analysis of education policy research by Mayo 2000; Rogers et al. 2005). As explained above, it is generally accepted within discourse theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) traditions that discourse is 'language use as social practice', moving to and fro between constructing and reflecting the social world. This model aligns with this broader view of discourse, as do its two key discourse theorists, but draws on key rules framing discourse within Foucault's 'Social theory of discourse' as it evolved in the theorist's works (Foucault 1969a, 1969b, 1970, 1979, 1980, 1981). Foucault sought to understand, in the poststructuralist sense, the genealogy of constructs that were considered 'natural' (in his examination of topics such as authorial creativity,² justice, normality and understanding). He analysed social cultures (around literature, the penal system, Victorian society, the Renaissance) to determine how such constructs are produced within, and produce, power/knowledge relationships. In his understanding of social cultures, 'orders of discourse' are the discursive practices in a society or institution and the relationships among them.

In a 1966 anti-humanist Nietzschean archaeology of human sciences (including sociology and psychology), Foucault (1970) particularly shows all eras have specific central conditions of so-called 'truth' that comprised what could be expressed as discourse (e.g. culture, science and art). These conditions change in relatively sudden major shifts, from period to period, such that truth and meaning are relative, temporal and contextual productions (Caputo and Yount 2006; Foucault 1972). He added further detail in a 1969 exploration of speech act theory, eschewing structuralist notions of prescriptive language (wherein semantic elements have predetermined meanings preceding their articulation), instead analysing how the 'statement' as the basic unit of discourse constitutes a network of rules that are the preconditions for making utterances or propositions meaningful (Foucault 1972). Statements are treated as events that depend on the contextual and interactive conditions in which they emerge and exist within a field of discourse; the meaning of a statement relies more on the succession of statements that precede and follow it than 'grammatical correctness'.³ He analysed discursive formations comprised of a huge organised dispersion of statement events. Where structuralists search for homogeneity in thinking, Foucault considers differences developed in the discursive field over time and refused to analyse statements outside of their historical context and the discursive formations to which they belong (Jones 1994, p. 155). An important point (although sometimes overlooked in education research) is that while Foucault seeks to understand dominant discourses, he also focuses on expelled and forgotten discourses that do not change the overall discursive formation by entering into cultural hegemony

² The presupposed creative genius of (for example) literary authors — Foucault (1969b) instead saw the 'author' as a construction which fulfilled various social functions in valuation of cultural knowledge.

³ Grammatically incorrect statements can still have meaning, grammatically correct statements may nevertheless be meaningless or nonsensical.

(Foucault 1972, 1981; Jones 1994; Mayo 2000). This is imperative because the differences of such alternative discourses from dominant discourses serve to further clarify 'what' hegemony entails.

In addition to these understandings, this model potentially also draws on Foucault's 'Rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourses' (Foucault 1976, p. 100). Thus, it can be said to theorise education policy as 'a multiplicity of discursive elements' rather than a world divided between one dominant discourse and 'the dominated one' (p.100). It therefore accepts that there can exist 'different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy' and unchanged discourses in 'opposing' strategies' (p.102). Education policy discourses are thus seen as 'tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations' (p.101). So where some research may discuss one or two key dominant discourses in the policy it explores, this modelling allows consideration of not only dominant discourses but also those that may be operant, dormant, challenged and even strongly negated across different policies within the education policy field. In addition, the model does not assume that the same discursive constructions in different policies are necessarily used in the same way. Instead, it is underlined by the possibility that the same constructions (of teachers, of education or other relevant research areas) may potentially be used in different policies in different ways, and even within the one policy (and its processes) in different ways.

Fairclough (1989) builds on (and one could say more cleanly 'organises' and perhaps 'refocuses') Foucault's more erratic work on discourse to create a distinct understanding of discourse as 'social practice', determined by 'sets of conventions associated with social institutions' (p. 17). Following Foucault, Fairclough's interest in discourse focussed on the links between language and power (Fairclough 1989). He suggests any instance where discourse takes place (which he calls a 'discursive event') has three aspects (Fairclough 1992, p. 4). First, text that can be 'read'—including all spoken and written language, visual images such as photographs and diagrams and non-verbal communication embodied in actions (Fairclough 1995, p. 54). Second, there are the discursive processes through which the text is developed and interpreted. This is Foucault's (1972) view of discourse as an 'individualisable group of statements', or the identification of different discourses through text analysis. Third, discourse is social practice or what Foucault (1972) terms 'regulated practice' that takes place within particularised socio-historic contexts. Therefore, the organisations and institutions within any setting shape discourses and vice versa. Fairclough's work thus extends and rearranges Foucault's ideas, but also centres them in a complicated way around texts such that his model lends itself more to textually oriented discourse analyses (TODA) and systematic Critical Discourse Analysis with a primarily contemporary focus⁴ (where Foucault was interested in genealogical and archaeological historical methodologies).

⁴ CDA is a particular method of discourse analysis developed by Fairclough that can be critical or post-structural in orientation, see method for more information.

Fairclough thus offers the threefold model of discourse (Fairclough 1989, p. 25) as manifesting in text, interaction and context that is a useful variation of the model (Fig. 2.2). Within this model, discourse is understood as manifesting in the social conditions that stimulate the production of the education policy, the processes of its production, the education policy itself (texts/images/spoken requirements), the ways in which the education policy is interpreted and practiced, and the context of this implementation. This particular model is useful for research that does not seek to limit the study's engagement constructions within policy to those within the texts themselves, but to include the constructions within social contexts before and after policy texts were developed, and those used in the production and interpretation processes of policy texts. In assessing the usefulness of these constructions of education movements or stakeholder roles, such research can thus explore their usefulness in different areas (such as usefulness in inciting the creation of policy, usefulness in sexuality classes, usefulness in terms of social and structural supports or usefulness as assessed by stakeholders themselves).

Where Foucault looks at the 'statement' within context, Fairclough further breaks down exploration of discourse into exploration of textual features (vocabulary, grammar, textual structures, turn-taking imagery) in conjunction with interactional features and contextual features (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995, 1998). All of these features potentially carry experiential value (the knowledge and beliefs being mobilised), relational value (traces of and cues to the social relations being enacted and constructed) and/or expressive values (traces of and cues to the subjects and social identities being enacted and constructed) (Fairclough 1989, p. 93). Analysis of discourse becomes possible through this model by three key processes within Critical Discourse Analysis: **description** of the text, **interpretation** of the relationship between text and interaction, and **explanation** of the relationship between interaction and social context (Fairclough 1989, p. 91). Research can thus examine the 'to and fro' of sexuality education discourses in these three policy aspects: sourcing data

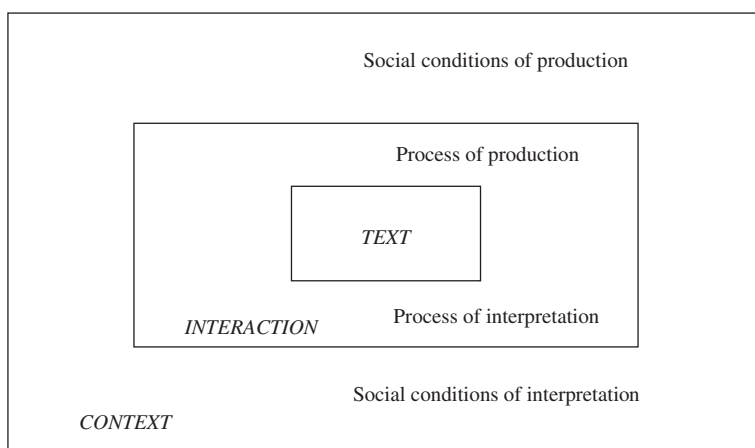


Fig. 2.2 Fairclough's model of discourse as text, interaction and context (Fairclough 1989:25)

from policy documents, but also data pertaining to processes of these documents' production and interpretation, and the surrounding social conditions.

Critiques of this model of discourse can be used to better understand it. Foucault's discourse model has been drawn on by theorists from Fairclough to Deleuze and Butler, and along with Fairclough's work it has been popular with post-structural, post-modern and critical discourse analysts in education research (Mayo 2000; Rogers et al. 2005; Van Loon 2001). While it has been cast as erratically developed even by Foucault (Foucault 1969a),⁵ the main relevant critique is it offers no solutions to 'real world' problems such as class or sex-based struggles (Callewaert 2006; Frank 1989). Manfred Frank provides the key neostructuralist critique (central to some Marxist, feminist and other critiques of the model that rely on the existence of universal structures) of Foucault's assertion that there is nothing outside of discourse, arguing it suggests there is no true reality and offers only chaos (Frank 1989, pp. 183–184). Frank further contends that ordering orders of discourse (through analysis such as in this study) is an attack on order 'as order' that favours disorder, making Foucaultian students enemies of order who can simply be derided as 'against everything' such that their critiques of discourse or the dominant powers are valueless and offer no solutions (Frank 1989, pp. 184–187). Yet such critique misunderstands that while Foucault and Fairclough indeed reject a single 'true reality' beyond discourse (even for subjects and situations), they actually don't theorise *any* exteriority to the orders of the discursive field to even constitute Frank's 'chaos'. Plus while all discourses are indeed partial, this does not mean that some cannot be seen as more or less useful (or problematic) than others. Order can be analysed in such research, but is not (and could not be, for theoretical consistency) conceived as extinguishable. However, reordering of the discursive field is possible (and occurs continually), and Fairclough argues that implementation of institutional discourses involves creative extension-through-combination of existing resources, and that there is particularly room for creativity when power struggles and relational changes lead to reordering opportunities (Fairclough 1989, pp. Chs 2–4). Useful directions for such co-construction *can be* considered in this research using this model of education policy, as can the usefulness of discursive constructs from particular perspectives; including the perspective or particular, or multiple, education policy stakeholders.

Therefore, education policy discourses are not only 'found' by researchers within policy texts or within schools, but across sites as varied as the field of education research and academic conferences, within media reports, in casual discussions between parents, at anti-racism rallies and so on. Luke and Luke highlight the complexity of such discourses:

Educational discourse thus can be seen as a system of signs and representations that traverse laterally through a synchronic grid: from the academic article to the policy document and curriculum specifications, from the folk wisdom of the staffroom to the

⁵ Foucault admitted he used discourse sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes particular groups of statements and sometimes as regulated practice, but argued that this only added to its meaning (Foucault 1969a).

principal's speech at the school assembly, and from the classroom text to student small group and lesson talk (Luke and Luke 1995, p. 364).

While it is not the aim of this brief to go into too much detail about any one particular discourse found in any one education policy, some 'recognisable' examples could include the way in which Traditional Christian Discourse or Radical Feminist Discourse may operate within sexuality education policy: each is promoted by specific groups of people; each mobilises a set of ideas about how sexuality education should be viewed; each promotes a distinct model of sexuality and authorised texts; each entails approved classroom activity (moral inculcation or analysis of gender roles); each suggests the school's role in censoring certain aspects of sexuality education; each explores topics such as contraception and homosexuality in a particular way; each characterises the roles of teachers and students (and so on).

Researchers and policy analysts investigating education policies often understand these discourses as placed within a binary opposition, on a scale, or as specifically contextualised by time/place. Unfortunately, it seems the politics of the particular education research/researcher often biases these exemplars, and limit the range of discourses they 'find' (for example within discursively complex policy they may only 'see' one key discourse, a conservative range of discourses, or one or two conservative discourses 'versus' a progressive discourse). This phenomenon reflects a wider trend of researcher bias in education policy research (Holmes and Crossley 2004). Yet for Foucault's 'tactical polyvalence of discourses' it might be conceivable for a Christian education system to mobilise both Traditional Christian Discourse and Radical Feminist Discourse (used as earlier examples) within its sexuality education policy, along with a variety of other seemingly paradoxical discourses, all functioning as tactics in achieving various goals.

The range of analysis approaches that could be applied to education policy is broad. The most suitable approach for qualitative analysis varies depending on the researcher's focus, and Perakyla gives some examples of textual analysis that may be appropriate here including informal approaches, semiotic analysis, discourse analysis, discursive psychology, critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis, historical discourse analysis and membership categorisation analysis (Perakyla 2005, pp. 870–875). Where discourse analysis needs to be qualitative, illuminative and historical, policy science needs to help make sense of the interactions of ideology with political and economic circumstance for policy makers. This seems a different matter entirely, but there is an overlapping interest in contextual political forces and their archetypes.

Keywords

Discourse

Hegemony

Text, interaction and context

Tactical Polyvalence of discourses

Tutorial and Field Activities

1. Choose an education policy topic area that is currently featured a lot in your local news.
2. Collect five articles, news clips or blog posts on the area (try to choose recent examples where possible).
3. What sorts of issues are commonly debated?
4. What are some opinions commonly held in this area?
5. What are some discourses (sets of beliefs or perspectives) in this area that could group sets of opinions together? For example, there may be a very distinct religious discourse often used, there may be very distinct social justice views, there may be arguments about 'quality' repeatedly being made etc.
6. Is there a dominant or traditional (hegemonic) discourse? Is it being asserted or challenged in the articles?
7. Do the articles sometimes draw on a few discourses in different ways?
8. Are the perspectives in the articles reflected in policy documents in this area?
9. What contextual factors, incidents or problems may have shaped the development of existing policies (or the lack of policies) in this area? What are some ways you could find out for a research project (what data sources are there, what methods could be used)?
10. In what situations could policy (or the lack of policy) in this area be used, and by whom? How could this implementation/practice be researched (what data sources are there, what methods could be used)?
11. How might these people using the policy be influenced by the key debates and discourses in this area? How could this be researched?
12. Would this policy fit some schooling contexts better than others? How could this be researched?

References

- Alexander, J. (1997). Out of the closet and into the network: Sexual orientation and the computerized classroom. *Computers and Composition*, 14(2), 207–216.
- Allen, L. (2007). Examining dominant discourses of sexuality in sexuality education research. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 17(1/2), 163–180.
- Angelides, S. (2008). The continuing homosexual offensive: Sex education, gay rights and homosexual recruitment. In S. Robinson (Ed.), *Homophobia: An Australian history* (pp. 172–192). Sydney: The Federation Press.
- APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation. (2009). *Report of the Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Apple, M. W. (1990). *Ideology and the curriculum*. New York: Routledge.

- Ball, S. (1993). What is policy? Texts, trajectories and tool boxes. *Discourse*, 13(2), 10–17.
- Ball, S., & Exley, S. (2010). Making policy with ‘good ideas’: Policy networks and the ‘intellectuals’ of New Labour. *Journal of Education Policy*, 25(2), 151–169.
- Bell, L., & Stevenson, H. (2006). *Education policy: Process, themes and impact*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Blakemore, K. (2003). *Social policy: An introduction*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bowe, R., Ball, S. J., & Gold, A. (1992). *Reforming education and changing schools*. London: Routledge.
- Callewaert, S. (2006). Bourdieu, Critic of Foucault: The Case of Empirical Social Science against Double-Game-Philosophy. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23(6), 73–98.
- Caputo, J., and Yount, M. (2006). *Foucault and the critique of institutions*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Codd, J. (1988). The construction and deconstruction of educational policy documents. *Journal of Education Policy*, 3(3), 235–247.
- Easton, D. (1965). *A framework for political analysis*. London: Prentice-Hall.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1993). Critical Discourse Analysis and the marketization of public discourse: The universities. *Discourse and Society*, 4(2), 133–168.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The critical study of language*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1998). *Political discourse in the media: An analytical framework*. Oxford: Blackwell Publisher Inc.
- Foucault, M. (1969a). *The archeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1969b). What is an author? In D. F. Bouchard (Ed.), *Language, counter-memory, practice: Selected essays and interviews* (pp. 113–138). New York: Cornell University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1970). *The order of things*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1976). *The history of sexuality: Volume one, the will to knowledge*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1981). *The History of Sexuality* (Vol 1). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Frank, M. (1989). *What is neostructuralism?* (Vol. 45). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fulcher, J. (1989). *Disabling policies: A comparative approach to education policy and disability*. Philadelphia: Falmer Press.
- Gee, J. (1990). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourse*. New York: Falmer.
- Gee, J. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. London: Routledge.
- Gilbert, R. (1992). Text and context in qualitative educational research: Discourse analysis and the problem of conceptual explanation. *Linguistics and Education*, 4(1), 37–58.
- Giroux, H. (1993). *Border crossings: Cultural works and the politics of education*. New York: Routledge.
- Ham, C., & Hill, M. (1984). *The policy process in the modern capitalist state*. Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books.
- Harman, G. (1984). Conceptual and theoretical issues. In J. R. Hough (Ed.), *Educational policy: An international survey* (pp. 13–29). London: Croom Helm.
- Holmes, K., & Crossley, M. (2004). Whose knowledge, whose values? The contribution of local knowledge to education policy processes: a case study of research development initiatives in the small state of Saint Lucia. *Compare*, 34(2), 197–214.
- Irvine, J. (2002). *Talk about sex: The battles over sex education in the United States*. Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press.

- Jennings, R. (1977). *Education and politics: Policy making in local education authorities*. London: Batsford.
- Jones, C. (1994). *Reassessing Foucault*. New York: Routledge.
- Kenway, J. (1990). *Gender and education policy: A call for new directions*. Victoria: Deakin.
- Kogan, M. (1975). *Educational policy-making: A study on interest groups and parliament*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
- Leitch, V., Cain, W., Finke, L., Johnson, B., McGowan, J., & Williams, J. (2001). *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism*. New York: Norton.
- Levinson, B. A. U., Sutton, M., & Winstead, T. (2009). Education Policy as a Practice of Power : Theoretical Tools, Ethnographic Methods. *Democratic Options. Educational Policy*, 23(6), 767–795.
- Lingard, R. (1993). The changing state of policy production in education: Some Australian reflections on the state of policy sociology. *International Studies in the Sociology of Education*, 3(1), 25–47.
- Luke, A., & Luke, C. (1995). Just naming? Educational discourses and the politics of identity. In G. Noblit (Ed.), *Continuity and contradiction: The futures of the sociology of education* (pp. 3–48). New Jersey: Hampton Press.
- Mayo, C. (2000). The uses of Foucault. *Educational Theory*, 50(1), 103–116.
- McLaren, P. (1992). Border anxiety and sexuality politics. In J. T. Sears (Ed.), *Sexuality and the curriculum: The politics and practices of sexuality education* (pp. ix–xiv). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Mills, S. (1997). *Discourse*. London: Routledge.
- Olsen, M., Codd, J., & O'Neill, A. (2004). *Education policy: Globalization, citizenship, and democracy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ozga, J. (1990). Policy research and policy theory: A comment on Fritz and Halpin. *Journal of Education Policy*, 5(4), 359–362.
- Perakyla, A. (2005). Analysing talk and text. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research (Third Edition ed., pp. 869–886)*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Prunty, J. (1984). *A critical reformulation of educational policy analysis*. Victoria: Deakin.
- Raab, C. D. (1994). Theorising the governance of education. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42(1), 6–22.
- Rogers, R., Malancharuvil-Berkes, E., Mosley, M., Hui, D., & O'Garro Joseph, G. (2005). Critical discourse analysis in education: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(3), 365–416.
- Sabatier, P. (1986). Top-down and bottom-up approaches to implementation research: a critical analysis and suggested synthesis. *Journal of Public Policy*, 6(1), 21–48.
- Scott, J. (1998). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Snook, I. (2000). *The Ethics and Politics of Values Education*. Paper presented at the A Keynote Address to the Values Education Conference, 21–3 Palmerston North, New Zealand.
- Van Loon, B. (2001). *Introducing critical theory*. Thriplow: Icon Books.
- Wodak, R. (1996). *Disorders of discourse*. London: Longman.
- Young, B. (2007). Rewriting the book on science instruction. *Principal*, 87(2), 28–31.

Understanding Education Policy
The 'Four Education Orientations' Framework
Jones, T.
2013, IX, 71 p. 2 illus., Softcover
ISBN: 978-94-007-6264-0